

14TH SEPTEMBER
ANCIENT GREAT WALL HERITAGE PARK
YANCHI, NINGXIA, CHINA

INVITATION
THIS INVITATION IS FOR YOU
TO AN EXCLUSIVE CEREMONY OF
THE DISAPPEARING GREAT WALL
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At The Construction of the Great Wall

At the Construction of the Great Wall

Master Thesis work of
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2020-2021
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ABSTRACT

The Great Wall of China, the embodiment of humanity’s magnificent construction, has lost its defensive function and is no longer needed today. Much of the Great Wall in Ningxia in northern China is abandoned and disappearing. However, the Great Wall is still a powerful cultural phenomenon, and its social meaning has subtly influenced many people, gradually transferring it to a symbol more than preserving its original meaning. For instance, Franz Kafka analyses the Great Wall and its symbolic meaning in his short story *At the Construction of the Great Wall of China* (1930). Although the story of the Great Wall is highly personal and Kafka’s fantasy, his interpretation of the Wall is relevant to the physical Great Wall in Ningxia. This thesis takes Kafka’s social meaning of the Great Wall as a reference to reinterpret the symbolic meanings of the Great Wall and reveals how the symbolism influences people in contemporary society.

To achieve these goals, this thesis conceives a story of a trip and a ceremony of the Great Wall as it is disappearing. As the characters K and I search for information about the ceremony by visiting the disappearing Great Wall in today’s Ningxia, they explore the stories and reflect on the construction and destruction of the Great Wall through dialogues during the trip. They conclude that the Great Wall symbolizes large-scale projects that need to be completed in different eras, but also a symbol of humanity’s desire for massive constructions, and that people are willing to gather to build and destroy the Wall to fulfil their needs in a collective behaviour. This process is constantly cyclical and repetitive in different contexts from different times. Moreover, through experiencing the collective behaviour about the Great Wall in the ceremony, K and I further describe and illustrate the participants’ confusions and reflections by their reconstruction process. They realize that even though the Great Wall will disappear, the reconstruction of the Great Wall will not stop; new Walls are being built continually.

The thesis consists of a background introduction, an analysis of Franz Kafka’s short story, the imaginary narrative of K’s and I’s exploration through the trip and the ceremony of the Great Wall and a conclusion based on the findings. The story explores the life of architecture and considers the human life of the built community. It raises more profound thinking and reflection of the Wall’s connection and impact of the Great Wall on human spirituality. The physical Wall is destined to fade, but the stories and the connections will stay, and the new Great Wall will be built.

Keywords: The Great Wall, symbolic, Narrative

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Finally, I want to express my thanks to all the people who have listened to my stories, who have helped and supported me for this work, especially in this challenging time.

Life goes on; let us live on.

With sincere regards,
Mengxue Gu
2021, Helsinki

PROJECT SYNOPSIS

My Thesis is an imaginary story.

There are mainly three parts: background introductions, the story, the reflections in the story. The story part is made up of the journey to the Great Wall and two fortresses, and a ceremony about the Great Wall and people.

The topic started after visiting the Great Wall in my hometown in 2019; I wanted to explore the symbolic meanings of the Great Wall and how it influences people from historical, theoretical and architectural perspectives. The exploring process had spurred many ideas and attempts, both in the theoretical and the design part. Nevertheless, the language of the Great Wall is too powerful that any of my practical proposals and the single research method seem to be speechless in front of it. I need to find my personal perspective and language. I started with investigating what stories and experiences given by my field research to the Great Wall, for instance, history, natural environment, construction methods, human activities and behaviours, and I expanded the narrative line and conceived my story based on the findings. The narrative story has been a driving theme in the thesis, but more importantly, the story consists of the historical outlook, an analysis of Kafka, theoretical reflections, conceptual proposals and collages. These researches contained several writing studies and drawing studies, and these studies helped me explore and approach the research questions and compose the story.

The work is different from the traditional ways of research expression, this story is my attempt, an attempt to give my answers to the task.

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INTRODUCTION

THE GREAT WALL AND I

The Great Wall, a symbol of China and Chinese culture, is one of the largest and most widespread historical and cultural heritage sites in China. Due to its wide distribution, most of the Wall was built from rammed earth. Most of these rammed earth Walls have now collapsed or been destroyed as their defensive significance has disappeared, due to natural erosion and weathering over time, and changes in human lifestyles and historical circumstances. Moreover, it includes the Great Wall in my hometown.

I grew up in a small place in the north-west China and I always knew that the Great Wall, which people describe as representative of Chinese culture and history, passed through my hometown Ningxia. But I never took the initiative to learn more about the story of the Wall in my hometown. First of all, the Great Wall is far away from where I live, and it doesn't look much like the Great Wall in the propaganda picture, which the well-known, the most visited clean and tidy brick Badaling Great Wall, The Great Wall in my hometown looks more like an abandoned mound of earth in long-time disrepair, as the locals called the Wild Great Wall. From the photos, if wild Walls were not enclosed by those simple fences, locals couldn't believe these walls were part of the Great Wall.

It was not until the summer of 2019 that I had the opportunity to go and find these abandoned wild Wall in the desert for myself. When I finally stood in front of this most magnificent project in human history, I was shocked and my emotions became very complex, I felt like I was disappearing in front it. I also felt the Wall was calling me somehow but I could not move my steps at all. Looking at the dilapidated Wall today, I realised that no matter how far away I was from the Wall physically, the Wall and its experiences seemed to be intimately connected to me. The Great Wall was not just a dilapidated piece in front of me, it had its own language and strong emotions that talked to me silently. I noticed that I had a powerful connection to the Wall, and this connection was not something that came to me while standing in front of it, but something I was born with, carried in my blood and bones, and a connection I had just never confronted.



Figure 1. Location of my hometown, Ningxia (Gu, 2021)
Ningxia, locates in the north-west of China, is one of the smallest province in China. Ningxia is one of the major agricultural origins of ancient East Asia, it was an important strategic military and food-producing area in ancient China.

As a representative of humanity's massive construction projects, the Great Wall is an example of a time when it losses its original architectural functions and the needs of local residents. In order to find out what makes the powerful connections between the Wall and myself, I started to attempt to hear the voice from the Wall and find out what the Great Wall represents for me and for this time.

During this research, I happened to find a short story written by Franz Kafka (1883–1924) about 100 years ago, named *At the construction of the Great Wall of China* (1930). This story inspired and enlightened my research and led me to a new perspective on the Great Wall. Kafka, who was in the distant Austro-Hungarian Empire at the time, had never visited the Great Wall of China, wrote a story about the construction of the Great Wall and made a connection to the Great Wall in his mind. It can be interpreted that he was talking about the Great Wall of China and at the same time not talking about the Great Wall of China. So the Great Wall has universal values that could be interpreted differently by anyone, and through this thesis, I have attempted to convey my understandings.

Following the example of Kafka, I decided to discuss the meanings of the Great Wall as a representation of the massive human projects by writing my own story of the Great Wall. The story takes place at a time when the Great Wall is about to disappear. Starting with an invitation to a ceremony of the Great Wall, I conceived an imaginary journey related to the Wall in Ningxia. The journey went through a segment of the Wall and two fortresses, then ended at the ceremony.

This thesis is an open invitation to every reader to think about the role of massive architectural projects and their infections on human spirituality, and defines the relationships between the massive construction and every individual.



Figure 2. Badaling Great Wall (Mauritius, 2015) $\frac{2}{3}$
Badaling Great Wall was built in Ming Dynasty (A.D.1368–1644),
is one of the most famous and visited Great Wall in China.
Location: Beijing, China

Figure 3. The wild Great Wall in Ningxia (Gu, 2019)
Location: The Great Wall heritage park, Yanchi, Ningxia, China

FRANZ KAFKA'S “AT THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA”

At the Construction of the Great Wall of China (Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer) is a short story by Franz Kafka. It is not a complete work but a manuscript sketched out in pencil like the other memos left in the little notebooks, which looks vague and a little confused. Kafka had no intention of publishing it during his lifetime. In 1930, seven years after his death, the German scholar Hans Joachim Schoeps found the manuscript and published it in a Jewish bimonthly magazine printed in Berlin, named *The Moon*. Schoeps then edited and distributed a collection of Kafka's posthumous works under the same title in collaboration with Kafka's friends, Max Bord₁. Therefore, *At the Construction of the Great Wall of China* could become known by readers. According to Schoeps's speculation, the story was written between 1918 and 1919, but the exact date of the story is not known, except that it must have been written after November of 1916 when Kafka moved away from his parents' home and lived alone on Alchimistengasse₂. It was a crucial time for Kafka and the Austro-Hungarian Empire in which he lived and for the world.

On 28 July 1914, with German support, Austria-Hungary launched a war of revenge against Serbia, a planned local war that quickly turned into a world war. In terms of logistics, the Austro-Hungarian army relied heavily on German support, from 1916 to 1917, the Germans' failure in agricultural harvesting and the maritime embargo imposed by the United Kingdom caused widespread shortages of supplies and fuel in the Danube Empire. This resulted in widespread hunger and poverty, and there was a war-weary mood among the population in Prague, Vienna and elsewhere with strikes and protests, the Bohemian Kingdom's long-standing struggle between the German and Czech communities for political dominance was intensifying₃. In the face of the constant civil discontent of the warring states, the nationalism of the Czech people also grew further. Simultaneously, the loss of the war, the deterioration of the economy, and the rapid decline in the population's standard of living made the Jewish community a "scapegoat" in all communities' eyes₄.

1. Liang, 2015, p.8
2. Schoeps, 1930

3. Liang, 2015, p.10
4. Cornwall, 2012



Figure 4–7. Print of Kafka's *At the construction of the Great Wall of China* 416
Figure 4. Anonymous, 2014; Figure 5. Anonymous, 1931;
Figure 6. Anonymous, 1982; Figure 7. Anonymous, 1948. 517

Since the outbreak of the First World War, Franz Kafka's relatives, acquaintances and friends had enlisted and left Prague. However, as an officer of the Labour Accident Insurance Agency in the Kingdom of Bohemia, Kafka could not fulfil his wish to become a soldier of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. At the time of completing *At the Construction of the Great Wall of China*, as a Jew in the Bohemian kingdom under the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Kafka was unable to break away from his identity as a subject of the late Austro-Hungarian Empire. The story is an imagined exit, an exit from the real world of the fictional world he created, and the fictional world he imagined could only begin there. Kafka placed himself in a distant eastern empire and created the character *I*, a twenty-year-old scholar, was fortunate to work on the Great Wall as an engineer with basic construction knowledge.

The story generally reads as follows.

1. The Great Wall had been declared completed in the far north of the Empire. But *I* was confused at this point by the way in which it was built in sections: the two construction armies from the south-east and the south-west were divided into groups of 20 workers, who worked in opposite directions, each taking five years to complete the 500 metres assigned to them. After the two sections of the Wall had been brought together, they were sent far away to continue building the other wall parts. The consequence of this "segmental construction" was that the Wall was not built as one, leaving gaps between sections, some of which were not filled even after completing the whole project, which will probably never be filled again₅.

2. A scholar indicated that the construction of the Wall would provide a solid foundation for the rebuilding of the Tower of Babel₆.

3. *I* continued to speculate and analysed the intentions of the "supreme leader" for the construction of the Wall in sections, only to discover that no one knew the identity or residence of the "supreme leader"₇.

4. The Great Wall was supposedly built to defend against barbarians from the north, but as a southerner thousands of miles away, *I* have never seen the vicious face of the barbarians₈.

5. The dying emperor tries to deliver a message through his messenger to a subject in a distant corner of the Empire, but the strong messenger cannot get out of the overcrowded capital, and the subject can only sit by the window at sunset and wait in vain₉.

During the construction of the Wall, the *I* from the text continued to ask questions about the construction of the Wall, from how it was built and the connection to the supreme power behind its construction.

In the story when the Great Wall of China was built, Kafka became a comparative ethnographer who participated in its construction, even a messenger who was unable to get out of the palace. He used different identities and visions to tell the story of a powerful movement about the Great Wall on the other side of the world.

What is the significance of the Great Wall as a massive construction project? How did the emperor control his people through the construction of the Great Wall? And how did this massive project affect the people involved in its construction? Kafka asks these questions throughout the story, repeatedly exploring the life of the building itself and the effect of its construction on human nature and soul.

In Kafka's descriptions, the construction of the Great Wall was complicated and confusing, even absurd. However, at the same time, it seemed very realistic because of the detailed division of labour and processes, and even had many similarities to the Great Wall in real life. One could say that Kafka was writing about the Great Wall, but not about the Great Wall. The Great Wall in Kafka's writing became a meaning of symbolism. The Great Wall, the representative of the massive human construction project, has a universal meaning. This thesis is also a reinterpretation of the symbolic significance of the Great Wall for today's society and even for the future, by focusing on the abandoned Great Wall in real life under the influence of Kafka's story of *At the construction of the Great Wall of China*. Moreover, it is a valuable inspiration to find the author's character *I* to search the meanings that the Great Wall represents and tell the story, as Kafka did.

9. Kafka, 2015, p.321–322

5. Kafka, 2015, p.315
6. Ibid., p.317–318
7. Ibid., p.318–319
8. Ibid., p.319–320

READER GUIDES FOR THE STORY

1. The story's name is At the Construction of the Great Wall.
2. The story is the work, the design.
3. The story is based on an existed site and theoretical researches, but it is an imaginary story.
4. The story consists of the historical outlook, analysis of Kafka, theoretical reflections, conceptual proposals and collages. They are the process to explore and approach the research questions as well as compose the story.
5. The story is made up of the prologue - the invitation, the journey, the ceremony, and the epilogue - A letter to K. The journey starts from the Great Wall heritage park, passes the fortress Xingwuying and ends at Huamachi.
6. The story has two characters, K and I. K represents part of the ideas and opinions in Kafka's story, and I represents part of the author.
7. The story is formed by the descriptions and discussions. The description is from character I's perspective, and the discussions are from characters K and I.
8. The story has different functional texts; they are sorted as follow,

TITLE

Subtitle

INTRODUCTION

The description

K in the dialogue

I in the dialogue

Citations

Figure title

Information about the illustrations and text

9. The story is an attempt to work with creation to combine the theory and design, to make the work understandable and easy to reach by every reader.
10. The story is for everyone, No matter how much the reader knows about the Wall before reading it, the reader may become I and find his or her own Wall while reading the story.

At the Construction of the Great Wall

PROLOGUE
THE INVITATION



Figure 8. The envelope of the Invitation (Gu, 2021)

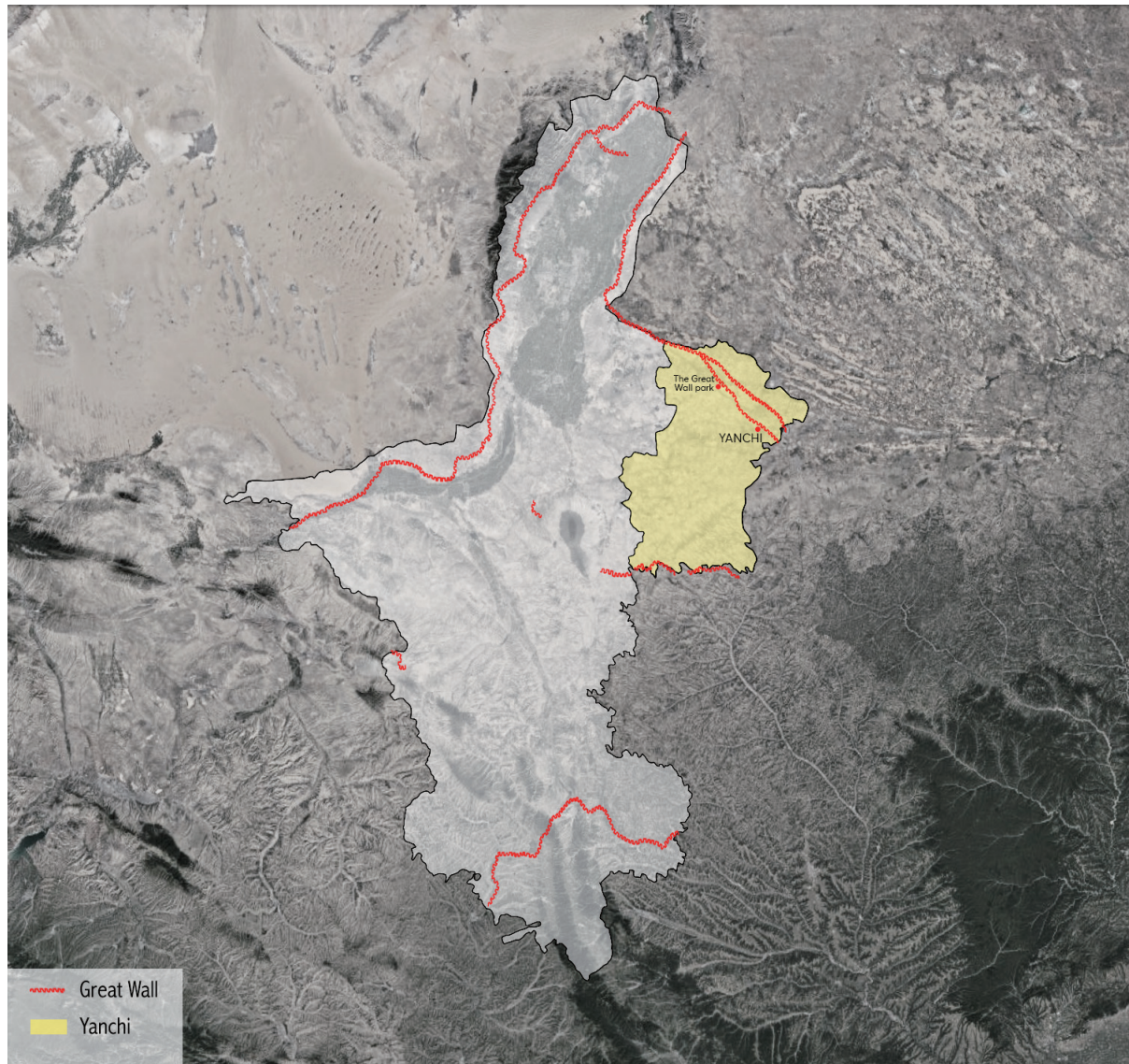


Figure 9. The Great Wall in Ningxia (Gu, 2021)
Ningxia has a rich heritage of ancient Great Wall, which was built for almost 2000 years from the Warring States period to the end of the Ming Dynasty.

After many years of being abandoned, Great Wall in Ningxia was about to disappear.

The Great Wall has a rich history in Ningxia, a tiny province in northern China. Because Ningxia has been on a warring frontier since ancient times, the Great Wall has been built here in almost every dynasty. However, the Great Wall, here, is very different from those TV propaganda films that show the complete continuous climbing of the brick Great Wall through the mountains. Because Ningxia is located in a desert area, the Ming Great Wall that remains today, for example, was built by applying the principle of taking materials from the local area and adapting to the local conditions, which was basically built of rammed earth and rough stones, some originally being built based on the Great Wall from the previous dynasties. At the same time, few parts were added with clad bricks. After the Great Wall has been abandoned in the last hundred years, the number of rammed earth Great Walls has also become less and less due to natural and man-made factors.

I, a young architect, grew up in a small city in Ningxia, which was not far from the Great Wall until the age of 18, and then left to live and work in a place far away from home. The Great Wall was both new and familiar to me, familiar as I always felt it was not far away, and I could always see these earth Walls on both sides of the road when I drove. Moreover, the strange feeling was because, apart from seeing the Wall in front of me, I never seemed to want to actively learn about the history and stories of these abandoned walls.

Only a few years ago, I had the chance to attend a short panel discussion on the Great Wall in the north, and it was then that I started to pay attention to these earthen walls and occasionally care about their stories. However, that was about all I remembered about the Great Wall, and I have not been back to my hometown to see it for a long time. Even the fact that the Wall was going to disappear was something that local people had taken for granted to ignore or forget. I recalled that in the last decade or so, the government had tried to protect the Great Wall and develop tourism projects related to it, including the Great Wall heritage park in Yanchi, located in eastern Ningxia. However, the government struggled to complete such a large scale project with limited financial support. Ningxia was an initially small place with little attention, and the Wall-based tourism industry operated poorly. Without human protection and with the occasional sandstorm and heavy rainfall in the area, the disappearance of the Great Wall from the land is a foregone conclusion.

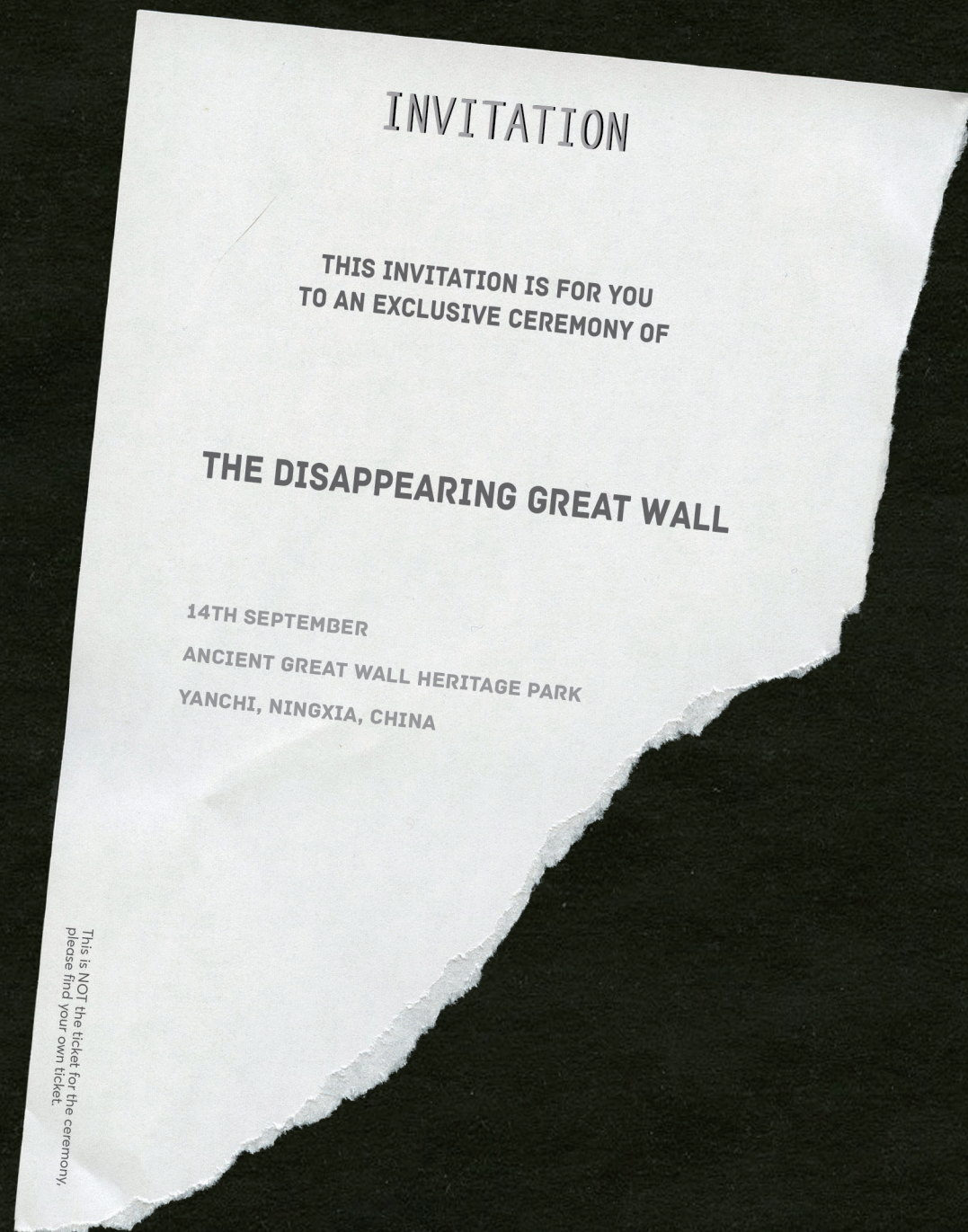


Figure 10. The Invitation (Gu, 2021)

On a typical day, I received an invitation to a ceremony about the Great Wall. The location of the ceremony was chosen at the Great Wall heritage park in Yanchi, and it was to start very soon. However, strangely enough, besides the approximate area and start date, the invitee did not reveal how to participate in the ceremony, the exact content of the process, or any detailed information about the ceremony.

This mysterious invitation instantly evoked memories of my time with the Great Wall. It brought back the sense of calling that I needed to say a formal farewell to the Great Wall, and this ceremony seemed to be preparing for that.

However, there was so little information about the ceremony, and I still knew so little about the Wall that I thought I needed to find a fellow traveller.

I did not know who had received this invitation, I searched the contacts list for a while and found one person.

K, a Chinese scholar who studied comparative nomenclature history and passed the highest exams at the lowest school, with basic architectural knowledge, once joined the construction of the Great Wall in the north as an engineer at the age of 20. I had a short encounter with him during a panel seminar on the abandoned Great Wall at the time, but we never got in touch again as the project was put on hold. However, I clearly remembered that K always had endless questions and thoughts about the construction of the Great Wall. Moreover, because of his unique experience, he always had a very distinctive perspective on the Great Wall. Even though he had not been involved in the construction of the Great Wall in my hometown, I might have gained more by inviting him on the journey with me, and he would undoubtedly be interested in the ceremony.

I tried to send him a message. Surprisingly, he contacted me immediately.

K: Did you get the invitation as well?

I: Yes, although it's very sudden to ask. But this is about the ceremony of the Great Wall in my hometown, and I thought you would be interested in it too. And I am familiar with the area. If you would like, we could go together.

K: That would be great! There is so little information on this invitation that it would be fantastic to have local people to travel with. I probably heard about the Great Wall of Ningxia in the panel a few years ago. Has it changed much in the past years?

I: I have not been back there for a long time either, but as far as I know, the Great Wall is about to disappear. I think that is why there is this ceremony.

K: Do you know who has been invited? Will it be mainly your local people?

I: I do not know, I have not seen any invitations for this ceremony in the local media or on social networks at all. We are such a small area. If they just wish to invite local people, they could announce it on TV or at everyone's workplace, so why go to the trouble of sending individual invitations to everyone.

K: Speaking of the invitation, did you see the line in the corner of the invitation?

This invitation is NOT the ticket for the ceremony, please find your own ticket.

I: Yes, I found it so interesting. I just noticed that I have never been to such a mysterious event with so little information. The tickets are usually paper, and since both of us got the invitation, could it possibly be that the tickets were our work passes at the time because of the Wall panel we had been on together?

K: Not very likely. Not many people were involved in the panel at the time, and the invitation did not look that academic, so it would not have been limited to people who had studied the Great Wall.

I: More than just the researcher of the Great Wall, in general, perhaps it is the Chinese passport? The Great Wall represents Chinese history and culture, so perhaps only Chinese people can come and participate?

K: If it is a proof of identity like a passport, does it mean that all Chinese people can come and participate? However, this invitation was not sent to all Chinese.

10. Pinto, 1998, p.214-216

11. Mendoza, 1998, p.27

12. Voltaire, 1995, p.212

I: On the other hand, it is not only the Chinese who have been associated with the Great Wall. In the West, narratives of China have been related to the Great Wall for a long time. In the sixteenth century, the Portuguese Pinto's *The Oriental Witnesses* referred to Chinese kings sending prisoners to build the Great Wall¹⁰, and the Spanish Mendoza's *The Empire of Greater China* was dedicated to the Great Wall of 500 miles¹¹. As a marvel, the Great Wall eventually became a symbol of China in the West, and in 1756 Voltaire's *Essay on Customs* called the Wall, in its use and size, it was a more incredible monument than the pyramids of Egypt¹².

K: Well, the study and understanding of the Great Wall have not been limited to China itself for a long time. Many writers created literary works related to the Great Wall in the 20th century; Franz Kafka from Austria wrote *At the construction of the Great Wall of China* around 1917. The Argentinean Jorge Luis Borges wrote *About the Great Wall and the Book* in 1950. So there should be no restrictions on who can be invited; everyone who has established a connection with the Great Wall is potentially invited. Then the tickets should also have nothing to do with the factors of nationality, gender, status, education, age.

I: Consider it this way, perhaps the tickets are not the traditional tickets as we have understood either. I have heard that tickets for many events have recently changed, so instead of the traditional paper ticket, they can also be an object, more like a token or even a code word. So maybe a photo we once took of the Great Wall could be the ticket, or stones and tiles scattered around the Wall, sheep grazing in the area, horse-drawn carriages... or even the Wall itself and our memories of it, all of which could be the ticket that starts the ceremony.

K: In any case, why don't we revisit the Great Wall in your hometown and maybe we will find more clues about the tickets and the ceremony.

We agreed on a date to go to the Great Wall heritage park in Yanchi together before the start of the ceremony.

And that was where our journey began.

CHAPTER 1
THE SILENT SHEEP PEN

INTRODUCTION

- This is the chapter where the journey to discover the Great Wall starts.
- Our walk started with the artificial Wall tower at the entrance, passed through the Great Wall sectors and reached the sheep pens scattered alongside the Wall. Along the way, we explored the relationship between the mysterious entrance to the new built tower and the legendary Babel Tower, analyzed the reasons and context in which the Wall became dilapidated when we saw it, and finally found the missing bricks of the Wall on the scattered sheep pens. We have thought about the significance of the massive project represented by the Wall and the relationship between the people involved in it.

The Tower

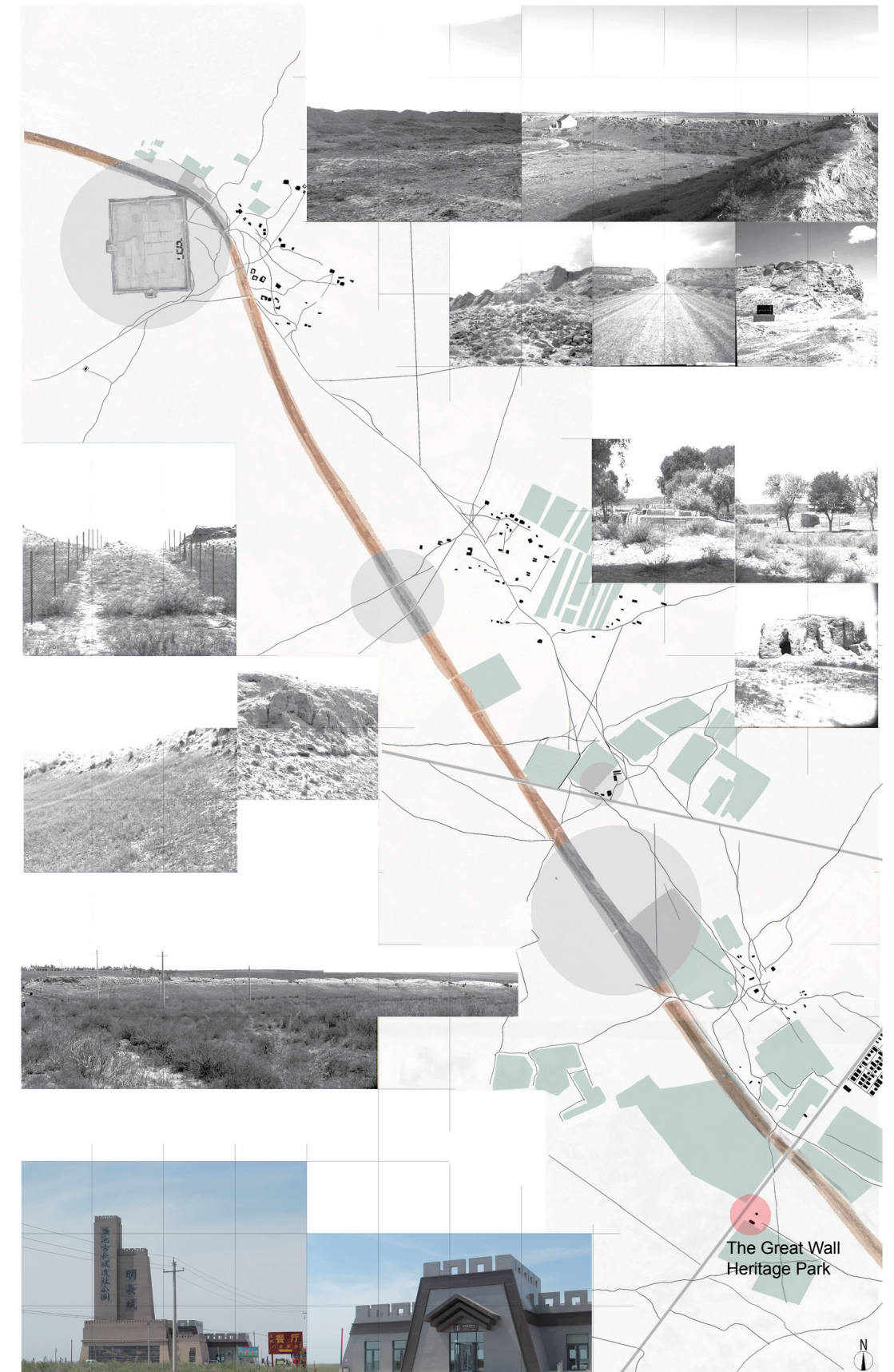


Figure 11. Journey Map, the Great Wall heritage park (Gu, 2021)



Figure 12. The Tower (Gu, 2019)
 The words on the tower translated as: Ming Great Wall,
 Yanchi Ancient Great Wall Heritage Park.
 The red sign indicates the location to the restaurant.
 Location: The Great Wall heritage park, Yanchi, Ningxia, China

After 3 hours of driving, K and I finally reached the ruins of the Great Wall which had been renovated into the Great Wall heritage park for visitors to see the remains of the Wall. But when we arrived, we found it even more deserted than we had expected.

The location of the heritage park was rural, and there were only a few buildings to be passed along the way. After the passing monotony of the landscape along the way, the entrance to the park was striking, a thirty-meter high tower with a large Ming Great Wall inscribed on it.

I: It's an obvious entrance to the Great Wall, with this tower.

K: This tricked tower looks sad, despite the fact that this is the closest thing to a Great Wall in the area, the well-built tower is as simple as a plastic toy beside the Wild Great Wall.

I: It is not rare to find such a replica of ancient work, and its placement next to the Great Wall is probably a reminder to passers-by that the Great Wall may have been this magnificent in the past.

K: Perhaps in time, it will also become a part of the Great Wall, and future generations will build on it and build new towers.

As the only visitors, we stopped and decided to have a look at the tower. When we walked inside, we found that the ground floor of the tower was actually a restaurant, with chairs set up on tables in the main hall, and only three people were playing with their mobile phones in the empty restaurant.

K: They didn't pay any attention to us when they saw us in the doorway.

I: There are cars parked next to the tower, so I guess they were villagers from the neighbourhood who got such a free job.

K: And such an easy job, it seems that they do not have to handle many tourists every day, and if they are lucky, they do not even need to heat their cookers for most days.



Figure 13. The Tower of Babel (Bruegel, 1563)
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna,
Oil on panel

- 13. Kafka, 2015, p.318
- 14. Kafka, 2015, p.318
- 15. Bible, 2001, Genesis 11:1-9
- 16. Bible, 2001, Genesis 11:1-9

I wanted to take a look at the tower but found that the entrance was locked, and when I looked through the gates, it was very dark inside, as it seemed that the door did not lead to the top of the tower but the basement.

I: This restaurant is so weird, and so is this entrance. I wonder what mysterious new world this dark entrance leads to...

K: Maybe this is the entrance to the new Babel Tower. One scholar was convinced that the Great Wall was the only thing in human history that could provide a solid foundation for the new Babel Tower and his idea was to build the Wall first and then the Babel Tower₁₃. But until now I cannot understand how he conceived of the new tower. The Wall is not a circle, not even a half or quarter circle, so how could it be the foundation of a tower₁₄?

I: I have read that the story of the Babel Tower was taken from the Bible. It told the story of when people on the earth all spoke the same language, and when they left the East, they came to the land of Shinar where the people tried to burn bricks to build a city and a tower to spread their fame and prevent them from being scattered around the world₁₅. When God came to earth and saw the city and the tower, he said that a group of people who spoke only one language would be able to do everything they could do, so he disturbed their languages so that they could not understand each other, and scattered them throughout the world, then the construction of the city stopped₁₆. The city became known as the City of Babel.

K: I couldn't imagine how could the Great Wall be the foundation of the Bable Tower.

I: I had never made the connection between the Babel Tower and the Great Wall until I realized that there were similarities between these two massive projects, both of which were some of the greatest massive-projects of all time. And the people involved in the construction were from different parts of the world. They came together and kept building them over and over again. However, the idea that the Great Wall was the foundation of the Babel Tower did not make sense, in terms of the form of its construction. As you said, the Wall is more like a horizontal version of the Tower of Babel than its foundation.

K: This can only be understood from a spiritual perspective. People were free and wild-minded in those days, and this scholar's book is an example of that - perhaps the aim was simply to bring different powers together for a common purpose¹⁷. Man is so rash and fickle by nature that he could not bear to be bound like dust, that if he restrains himself, he will soon break free in a frenzy, tearing the chains, the Wall and himself to pieces¹⁸.

I: The dark corridor in front of me seemed to brighten up instantly, and I thought that if we followed down it, we would meet more and more people, all from different places and different backgrounds. But all of them had been motivated by the spiritual power to commit themselves to a massive unknown construction project, and probably the new Great Wall is now being built underground.

K: At the moment, it seems, something is calling us to explore the Wall.

Talking about and looking in the direction of the Wall,

K: it's time to see the real Great Wall.

17. Kafka, 2015, p.318
18. Kafka, 2015, p.318

A Massive Dimolition Project



Figure 14. Journey Map, the Great Wall (Gu, 2021)



Figure 15. The Great Wall (Gu, 2019)
Location: The Great Wall heritage park, Yanchi, Ningxia, China



Figure 16. The plant growing next to the broken Wall (Gu, 2019)
Location: The Great Wall heritage park, Yanchi, Ningxia, China

We left the tower and followed the fence on the side of the Great Wall, and the overall Wall's condition looked pretty much the same. The Wall looked like thick, small dunes attached by mounds of rammed earth. The occasional peak mounds were very much like camels that walking slowly on the dunes, one after the other, continually moving forward. Every about 50 meters, there was a gap of 2–3 meters, which local villagers had made at an earlier time to allow vehicles to pass through. The green fence was a dozen meters away from the Wall. Standing in the gap, I was able to be closer to the Wall. As I climbed up to be in the middle of the two segmental Walls, I realized that the Wall that we could see was actually relatively short and tiny. Then I moved closer, and I could vaguely see some traces of brick on the Wall's surface through the gap of the fence. In contrast to the brick buildings that I had generally seen, the bricks that I could see in the Wall were not rhythmically distributed. Most of them were ambiguous, transformed into the sand, and became part of the Wall forever, with no trace of each brick.

K: The weeds are growing nicely, and the desert treatments are working effectively. Surprisingly, this sandy land looked green, like the Great Wall has risen from the desert to the meadow.

I: It is originally a desert land and has been a sheep grazing area since ancient times. As a result of natural conditions and overgrazing, the land in the area is heavily sanded. Before the 1980s, a large part of the county's population and cultivated land were in the sand field, and many locals couldn't withstand the sand storm; they left their hometowns to find jobs. In order to completely reverse the relationships of sand and people, in the later years around 2000, the local government promoted sand land management, reforestation and planting, and herded sheep from the mountains into pens. The villagers began to raise sheep in pens, and as time passed, the vegetation on the sand gradually grew stronger and stronger.

K: So all this damage was done by the locals?

I: You can say yes as well as no.



Figure 17. The openings on the Wall (Gu, 2019)
Location: The Great Wall heritage park, Yanchi, Ningxia, China

19. Xu, 2014, p.220
20. Beijing Municipal Committee of China, 1953

I: At the turn of the 20 century, some of the scattered destruction was on a small scale. I heard from locals, shepherds or vagrants who needed to find a temporary shelter would cut out some openings in the Wall to make living easier for a short time. Part of the Wall was also removed for pathways to meet the locals' needs for easier accessibility¹⁹. Once a single entrance was dug out and everyone enjoyed the convenience, they slowly started digging a second, and a third... until it became what the disconnected Wall looks like now.

K: It seems that people did not have the consciousness of protecting the Great Wall at that time

I: It also had much to do with the functional loss of the Wall, as it was no longer needed, had been eroded by the wind and sand, and had gradually fallen into disrepair, no longer in the same condition as the magnificent Great Wall of China. And most of those who tore down the Walls had no idea what they had torn down, nor were they warned about the history of these Walls. From the moment the Wall was abandoned, its name and its grandeur were gradually forgotten by this world. Moreover, the Wall was built in the olden days to manifest the feudal Emperor's idea of sole dominance and defence against peasant 'rebellion' and this determination of the Wall's identity inevitably influenced its survival²⁰. The limitations of the Walls during the feudal period demonstrated not only the closed system of the society at that time, but also the contradiction and conflict between the dilapidated Walls and the construction and development of modern cities, where people needed convenient transportation more than the useless broken Walls.



Figure 18. The report on the starting of Cultural Revolution (People's Daily, 1966)
The title translated as "Sweeping away all evil spirits and snakes and gods".

21. People's Daily, 1966
22. Qu, 2005, p.69
23. Beijing Daily, 1957

I: Later on, there were a few organized and large-scale Wall demolitions, but most of the demolitions were took place during the Cultural Revolution.

K: That Cultural Revolution? I only have heard about it, how it began?

I: The Cultural Revolution was a political movement that took place in China between 1966 and 1976. The start was on June the 1st in 1966, the editorial of the *People's Daily*, "Sweeping away all evil spirits and snakes and gods", put forward the slogan "Destroy all the old ideas, old cultures, old customs and habits that have poisoned people's lives for thousands of years and that have been created by the exploiting classes"²¹.

K: How were these ideas related to the Wall?

I: During the Cultural Revolution, Walls were commonly demolished because of their solid political symbolism and typical old ideology. In the press of the time, Walls were used as the product of sectarianism and were the cause of divisions.²². An article in the *Beijing Daily* in 1957 stated that any wall that separated the Party from the people had to be torn down, no matter how high it was. "Whether they were tall, low, thick, thin, intermittent or, as some described it, the Great Wall of China, they all had to be torn down; no one had to be polite about it"²³. In the 1970s, during the Cultural Revolution, the Great Wall was demolished on a large scale in various places. Either by the army or the authorities or by the people's communes. At that time, many local villagers were involved in stripping the bricks from the Wall.

I: Just like the other activities at the time of the vast Cultural Revolution, the demolition of the Great Wall mainly was carried out with great enthusiasm, listening to commands and shouting slogans.

K: This kind of massive demolition of the Great Wall is very much like the massive project when the Wall was built. What about the bricks that were taken from the Wall?

I: Some of the pieces were left and buried in the sand and where the best bricks have gone ... We will know soon.

The Silent Sheep Pen



Figure 19. Journey Map, the sheep pen (Gu, 2021)



Figure 20. the Sheep Pen build by the bricks from the Great Wall (Gu, 2019)
Location: The Great Wall heritage park, Yanchi, Ningxia, China

After a short walk, a few dwellings gradually appeared close to the Wall. These houses looked the same colour and level as the Great Wall, one-story high, sparsely distributed on the vast field of sand and grass from a distance. The houses looked very interesting, as each one had a sheep pen. The houses were built with new bricks, which looked like they had been built over the years, but the sheep pens were made of earth bricks, constructed neatly one by one, and looked no different from the Great Wall. Only the bricks in the sheep pen looked much more complete and prettier than the bricks in the Great Wall.

I: I heard that many years ago, the farmers nearby would take the best quality bricks from the surrounding Great Wall and use them to build sheep pens. These are really good quality bricks from hundreds of years ago.

K: It must be really quality, these are the bricks that were used to build the Great Wall, and they ended up having them used to pen sheep.

I: The fate of the Great Wall bricks was truly turbulent, as they were carried to the desert by the builders hundreds of years ago, and were exposed to the wind and sun for hundreds of years. Some of the bricks were slowly shattered into sand and carried away by the wind, while the only decent ones were taken away by people who passed by, moved to one side and built up with mud just like how the Great Wall was built. Except whereas before it was the city and its people inside that were fenced up, now there are fewer and fewer people staying here that it is the sheep and the people who keep the sheep that are fenced up.



Figure 21. The Green Fence and the Wall (Gu, 2019)
Location: The Great Wall heritage park, Yanchi, Ningxia, China

K: What about these green fences? They must be built after the bricks have been taken to build the sheep pens.

I: I was told that these green fences had been partially built by the local government in the last few years, those who sit in distant offices and make the orders, mainly to isolate the Wall from human destruction.

K: That's interesting, for thousands of years, one of the purposes of building the Great Wall was to protect the people and land it enclosed, but the Wall had to be protected as the main hero at the moment.

I: These green fences appeared to be the new Great Wall built by the authorities. However, I was confused when I looked at the Great Wall and the sheep pens enclosed by the fences on the two sides. If it was the Great Wall that the fence was meant to protect, and this Great Wall was also built from pieces of bricks, why was the sheep pen which was also built from Great Wall bricks (and the best quality Great Wall bricks at that) beside it not needed to be fenced off?

K: I suddenly had a suspicion that even if the few bricks left on the Wall had been taken away and only piles of weeds and sand were remaining, they would have been fenced off and protected as a priority.

I: So for those in distant offices, the meaning of the Wall is more in these fences than in the fenced-in Wall. If we considered such, the Great Wall itself as being built brick by brick is useless and meaningless for the present age. It is the name of the Wall that has the meaning and tasks that need to be accomplished through this name.

K: The task? Like the massive projects, like when people come together to building and destroy the Great Wall or like the people not stayed, they left to find their massive projects to join.

I: Yes, there are many massive projects under construction. China has been marked by massive redevelopment and demolition over the past few decades, with large scale projects and programs gradually concentrated in large cities. Generations of people have moved away from their hometowns, searching for more opportunities in the urban centres, taking part in large-scale projects that are reshaping the world from one to another. As people moved to the urban centres, the relatively backward villages lost their vitality and attraction, with promising jobs available everywhere compared to sheep herding. Combined with the isolated location and harsh natural environment of the villages, the poor living conditions and inadequate infrastructure have made it challenging to meet the demands of the quality of life of most people, especially the young. With each generation's leaving, there were also many who have stayed, perhaps for family reasons, or out of fear of a new life in the big city, or out of dependence on the land where they grew up. It was just through the public eye that the people left behind, who were unwilling to participate in changing the world, became as abandoned as the Wild Great Wall.

K: In fact, the fascination with large-scale constructions has never ceased.

I: Exactly, hundreds of years ago, the Great Wall, which was abandoned in front of us, was one of the most significant construction projects of its time. In every dynasty, countless people have travelled far from their homes to attend and participate in this massive project. It was only later that the Wall was replaced by other major projects, turning it into a silent sheep pen for those who stayed behind.

K: About those who left, they could not escape the desire (or the inability to resist becoming a majority) to come to the new city, and only the large projects and the others who were involved could comfort the insecurity of being away from their familiar surroundings.

I: People become bricks, building a great Wall of their time.

K: When the people buried the first stones in the earth, they became one with the massive construction₂₄. They are destined to be combined with other bricks and stacked in a seemingly coherent social structure.

24. Kafka, 2015, p.316

I: Just as those who built sheep pens with bricks could not escape their desire for a massive project in their time - the demolition of the Great Wall to build their sheep pens. However, we, the onlookers, who now see these sheep pens built with Great Wall bricks will simply think that the people who built them are genuinely unaware of the value of the Wall, and they cannot even do anything right to protect the precious culture from our nation. On the other hand, those of us who live far away, checking documents and photos and sitting in the office every day, studying theories on how the Great Wall should be preserved. Apart from claiming that the Great Wall represents our national history and culture, how can we compare these distant people with those who have built houses with Great Wall bricks. Especially when it comes to the actual connections and affections with the Great Wall, or even for its usage and continuation, the people who used the brick have a more personal experience than us.

K: Those who took the bricks were probably full of joy and satisfaction when they selected the best bricks from the rammed earth walls, the best quality bricks left over from thousands of years ago, and were about to contribute to their households. Who would care where the bricks came from when considering their benefits, particularly when the taking action was under the organised operation. The Great Wall was understood indifferently by people under the influence of different backgrounds. For instance, in the Qing Dynasty, the Great Wall needed to be built, so people were gathered to participate in the massive construction project. In the late 20th century, when the Great Wall had to be demolished to facilitate the construction of other buildings, people gathered to dismantle it again. And not long before, the preservation and rebuilding of the Wall became a new large-scale project, and people rebuilt towers and fences. The Wall has not changed, the bricks have not changed, and people have not changed that they just devoted themselves to major projects again and again, and the building of the Wall has never stopped. Like the Great Wall, other massive projects have never stopped either, in different times and social contexts.

I: So how were people brought together time and time again to commit to massive projects?

K: Let us take a break and find the answers.

CHAPTER 2
THE SEGMENTAL WALLS

INTRODUCTION

- In this chapter, we sat down with the Great Wall and discussed how were people brought together fro the massive constructions from the method and meaning of the segmental construction of the Wall. We observed that, since the Wall was not continuous, the method of segmental construction conflicted with the defensive purpose of building the Wall. We discussed the purpose of segmental methods was to distract the builders from the task to sustain the Wall's construction. Moreover, the construction of the Wall itself was the reason for the leader to collect the people together. The leader used a strategy that allowed everyone involved in the construction to gain self-satisfaction so that no one would doubt the method and purpose of building the Wall. The leader could then securely and comfortably benefit from the supremacy of his authority. The construction needs people and the people also need the construction.

The Segmental Construction Method



Figure 22. Journey Map, the segmental Walls (Gu, 2021)



Figure 23. The lonely bench (Gu, 2019)
Location: The Great Wall heritage park, Yanchi, Ningxia, China

Moving on, we noticed a bench on the opposite side of the Great Wall. Interestingly this bench appeared to be the only object on the land, and, like the rest of the presences in this area, had the smell of a lonely sense of melancholy.

We decided to oblige the person who had placed the bench here by sitting down and having a good look at the Wall from its point of view.

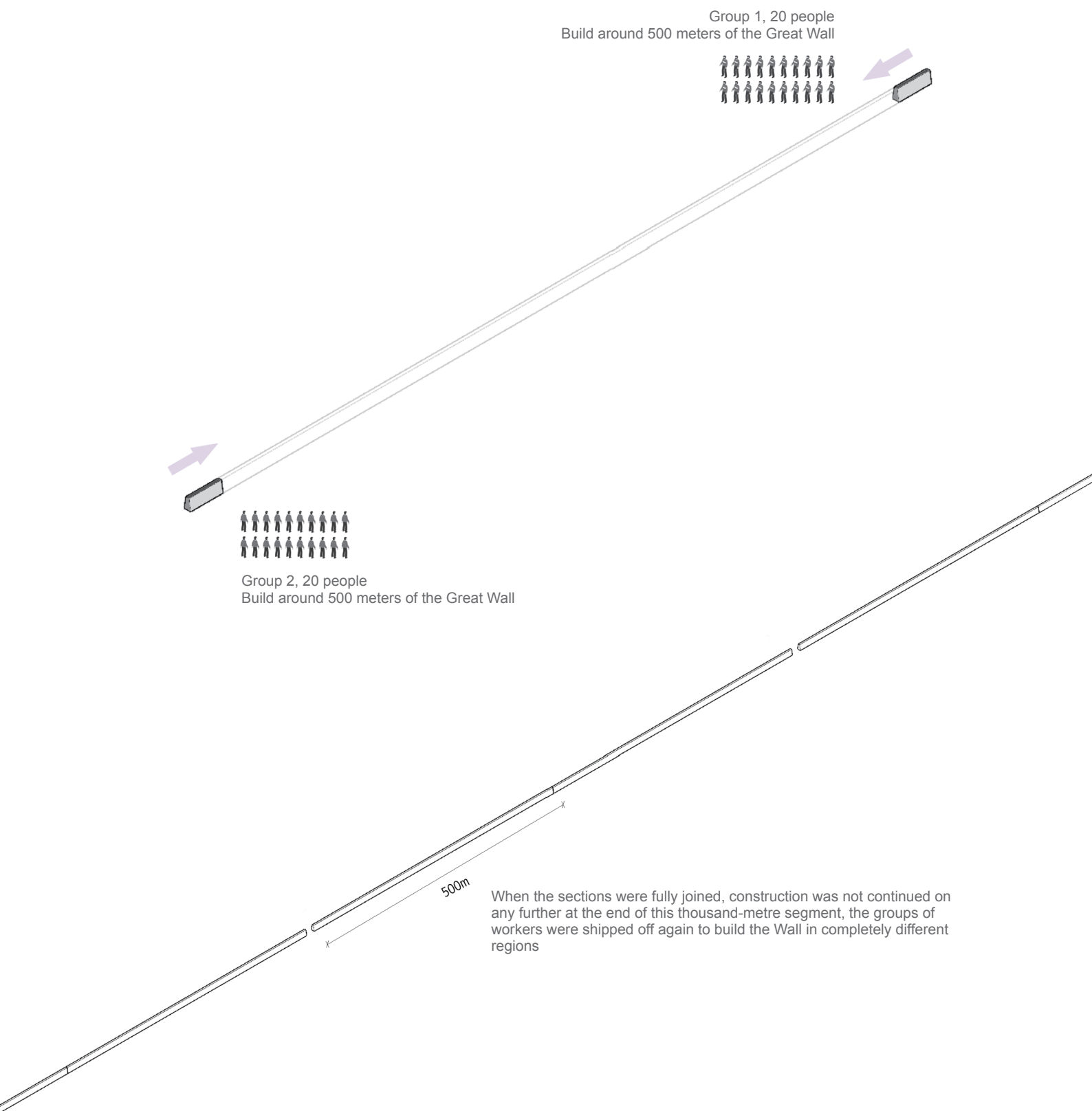


Figure 24. Diagram and explanations on the segmental construction method (Gu, 2021)

K: It's interesting to look at these segments of the Wall, even if they have been deliberately cut off into sections since then. Because when I was in the construction, we built the Wall in segmental method.

I: What is the segmental construction method?

K: The method worked in this way, with about twenty workers forming a team, each team responsible for building a section of the wall about 500 metres long, and a neighbouring team building a similar section of the wall in the opposite direction²⁵.

I: How could the builders make sure the Wall will meet?

K: They can not, after the two sections of the Wall had been joined together, instead of constructing further at the end of this 1000 meters segment, the workers were sent to build the Wall in entirely different regions²⁶.

I: What about the gaps? Will they fill the gaps later?

K: This construction method naturally left a number of large gaps which had to be filled up slowly, and even some of them were filled up only after the work was declared completed, although it is said that some of the gaps were never filled up at all...²⁷

I: If the initial construction method resulted in only a few sections of the Wall, it did not achieve the original purpose of building the Wall - to defend it from invasion. Did you build the Wall with the same goal in the beginning which to defend the invaders? The Wall here was built with that purpose ...

K: Yes, we built it in northern China to defend against the northerners. However, if it is full of gaps, how can it be a protection? It would not protect anyone, and it would have a lot of consequences. And I've never seen those legendary grim-faced northern barbarians in person²⁸.

I: So it seems that the segmental method of construction produced a Wall full of gaps that were useless as a building in itself; it was the segmental method that was the problem.

K: But there was an essential purpose for the segmental method of construction, and first, we need to understand who was involved in the construction of the Wall. There are three general categories of people involved in the Wall construction: the day labours who put in most of the physical work, the masons who guided the day labours, and the middle and higher supervisors who developed the strategy.

25. Kafka, 2015, p.315
26. Ibid., p.315
27. Ibid., p.315
28. Ibid., p.319



Figure 25. A breakpoint of the segmental Wall (Gu, 2019)
 Location: The Great Wall heritage park, Yanchi, Ningxia, China

29. Kafka, 2015, p.316
 30. Ibid., p.316
 31. Ibid., p.316
 32. Ibid., p.316
 33. Ibid., p.316
 34. Ibid., p.317
 35. Ibid., p.317
 36. Ibid., p.317
 37. Ibid., p.317

I: How did they work together?

K:The masons who had thought a lot about the Wall's construction and never stopped thinking about it had a sense of themselves as part of the Wall when they asked the labours who placed the first stone sunk into the ground, however, the day labourers do not experience this much, they are only motivated by their payment²⁹. The higher supervisors and, indeed, even the middle supervisors, are also able to have enough information about construction progressing in multiple ways to keep their spirits energized³⁰.

I: It seems that everyone has a reason to join in the construction, but is everyone uncomplaining? I mean, building the Wall is not an easy task.

K:There are some difficult people. For these special labours, men who were mentally far above their small tasks and low-ranked position, a different strategy must be taken³¹. For instance, they could not be left to lay one Wall segment on top of another for months, or even years, in a desolate mountainous region hundreds of miles away from their home³².

I: So they must be given expectations and hopes for the construction.

K: This kind of challenging task, which they could not hope to achieve even after a lifetime of work, would make them desperate and, above all, would make them worthless for the work they were doing³³.

I: That's the reason they decided to use the method of building in sections.

K: If we think that the five hundred metres of the Wall could be built in about five years, by which time in general the supervisors would naturally have been so exhausted that they would have lost all faith in themselves, in the Wall and in the world³⁴. So while they were still in the high spirits of celebrating the joining together of the 1,000-metre Walls, they were shipped far, far away³⁵. They saw the completed segments of the Wall rise here and there on their journeys, they passed the quarters of higher-ranking leaders and received the badges of honour, they heard the cheers of the new workers coming from the interior provinces, they saw vast forests being cut down to make scaffolding for the Wall, they saw mountain being hewn into bricks, and they heard the chanting of devotees in sacred religious places, praying for the completion of the Wall³⁶. The prestige enjoyed by all the builders, the faith and respect shown by people listening to the reports, the trust of simple citizens in the possibility that the Wall would eventually be completed—all this tuned the strings of their souls³⁷.

I: it seems that the segmental method of construction is understandable and it unites people together very well. The Great Wall, a construction built by all the Chinese, was not an individual work, but a collective and time-breaking activity. Those who directed the construction of the Great Wall divided the people involved into three classes and treated them differently. People with different identities could find their place in the project and get the achievements they needed. The purpose of the sectional construction method is to give those involved in the construction work an illusory sense of responsibility and hope, a sense that the work has a meaning and an end.

K: This state of hopefulness is essential, especially in massive construction projects, with a large amount of work and the number of people involved. Many people inevitably start to doubt the meaning and purpose of their participation. It is the reason that the hope is constantly replenished and filled in the construction process.

I: As Heidegger said, people's anxieties and fears were related to future issues; in terms of the source and sense of time, all feelings were related to the future³⁸. Moreover, hope not only has the properties of the future, but having hope in itself contains the meaning of existence. The quick realization of such hope is uncomplicated and immediate. By building in sections, time is cut into shorter pieces, and the endless time of constructing is transformed into the concrete results of construction, into each section of the Great Wall. The construction of the Great Wall is no longer an endless project, and every segmental Wall is proof.

K: Converting imperceptible time into shapely space, as well as the despair into hope.

I: The hope that comes with each real and visible piece of work allows the builders to overcome the frustration and disappointment caused by the long days of construction. Each individual could take part in the process, and the sense of responsibility they possessed was building a glorious empire. Thus, the construction of the Wall brought everyone together. The construction of the Great Wall was not a compulsory slavery, but an expression of collective will, a powerful national construction movement³⁹.

K: Even the segmental method of construction was just a strategy of the Empire trying to bring people together, but it seems to have worked.

40. Fei, 2013, p.26
41. Fei, 2013, p.26

I: it reminds me of an interesting statement made by a sociologist, who said that Chinese vernacular society is based on patriarchal groups, and that the relationship between people was a network, with kinship as the main axis, each person forming a network centred on his or her own⁴⁰. The system is like throwing a stone into a lake and using this stone (the individual) as the central point to form a circle of waves around it, with the proximity of the waves marking the closeness of social relations, a concept of differential order pattern that best reveals the characteristics of traditional Chinese society⁴¹. When people work together in collective behaviour, they give up some of their own benefits to the manager, who then realizes the benefits through the power of the collective so that everyone in the collective benefits and is satisfied. When the manager is at the centre of the circle, he can stretch the connections around him to infinity because of his absolute authority. Just as when the Great Wall was being built, the collective will, trust became highly centralized. The majority of people did not question the segmental construction method after gaining a sense of satisfaction, even though the Wall was no longer functional for protection. People are willing to trust the leader's decisions unconditionally and implement them, and the power becomes unnecessary to be challenged.

K: Therefore it is incomplete to say that people came to the Great Wall only because of the Imperial strategy.

I: Yes, people are living in a social system, and they need massive projects like the Great Wall. Instead of saying that people are controlled by imperial strategy, it's also true that in the process people choose the group they belong to and get the security they need, whether it's hope or security, through the Great Wall. Massive projects need people, and people need massive projects. A sense of security is just as important as a sense of hope, and when the majority of people are catering to the needs of the project, those who are not will lose their sense of security. Security is not just about the project itself, it is about everyone involved.

K: Joining in the construction of the Wall is the easiest and safest choice. I think the supreme leaders also considered this when they decided to build the Wall in sections, a strategy that seemed to conflict with the goal of defending it against invaders, I believe that the supreme directive has been in place since ancient times as well as the order to build the Great Wall⁴². The people living in the North were blindsided by the fact that the Great Wall was built for them; and the honest and innocent current Emperor naively thought that he had given the order to build the Wall, only we, the people who built the Wall, know that this is not the case, but we keep quiet about it⁴³.

42. Kafka, 2015, p.318
43. Kafka, 2015, p.320

38. Heidegger, 2006, p.83
39. Liang, 2015, p.16

I: The segmental Great Wall in front of me and the segmental Great Wall that you was involved in building just overlapped and intertwined with destiny in front of my eyes. The Great Wall in front of me has been repeatedly built by different collectives over the past two thousand years. And considering all those who have travelled far from their homeland to participate in this massive project have never questioned why they had to devote their entire lives to building the Wall. Because whatever the dynasty, the orders from the distant Emperor were never to be questioned. Rather than researching new defensive projects, it was better to continue this massive project for generations, with the people who built the Wall willingly satisfied for the sake of national security, and the Emperor enjoyed his supreme authority in doing so. In this way, the function of the Great Wall as a massive construction project over the centuries was not the only reason for its construction; rather the action of building it was equally important.

K: My query is relevant to historical research, therefore, I do not intend to latch on to why the Great Wall was built segmentally⁴⁴. I can only consider such a simple question for my thinking skills, but there is a lot more to it than that!

44. Kafka, 2015, p.320

CHAPTER 3

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF TWO CITIES

INTRODUCTION

- In this chapter, we ended our exploration of the Great Wall by finding and exploring the rise and fall of two fortresses that were built together with the Wall. We visited the now apparently dead city Xingwuying, and the living city Huamachi. We tried to understand the alternating states and meanings of the two fortresses in the cycle of life and death through the temples that existed in both places. At the same time, we also share other stories about cycle of reincarnation that took place in the Great Wall, exploring how time and human actions were being repeated and cycled in the process. The Great Wall represented the circulation of time and behaviours.

The Dead One At The Moment

We kept moving along the path and remembered from the map in the visitor centre that Xingwuying fortress was just a dozen kilometres ahead.

Xingwuying and Huamachi are well-known ancient fortresses near the Great Wall in the area; both of them were used as cantonment fortresses to garrison troops during the Ming Dynasty. The two cities were large and prosperous during the Ming Dynasty, relatively larger than the many towns and villages nearby today. Over the centuries, the fortress of Huamachi developed into the centre of the area (renamed Yanchi), while the Xingwuying fortress has been abandoned for centuries. The village named after Xingwuying had only about 100 inhabitants and was located some distance from the fortress.



Figure 26. Journey Map, Xingwuying (Gu, 2021)



Figure 27. Satellite imagery of Xingwuying (Google earth, 2021)
Location: Xingwuying, Yanchi, Ningxia, China

Looking at the desolation along the road, with only sand and sparse meadow,

K: It seems that the old fortress of Xingwuying was completely abandoned as well.

I: That's not for sure.

I: I saw a picture on the internet earlier, and I heard that an oilfield owner had built a magnificent temple in the Xingwuying fortress a couple of years ago, and I even looked it up on the map, and there actually is one!

I handed K the phone,

I: Look at this satellite map, it's right here! I just don't know if it's still there after the Great Wall conservation project. At least in the immense desert land, the outline of the squared fortress is apparent. Only the inside and outside land of the walls don't look too different from the map.

K: Look here, on the east edge by the Wall, there is a concentrated area with several staggered buildings. Come and see these roofs! The bright coloured roofs of these buildings are jumping out from the earth-coloured walls and the desert. The buildings are very striking.

I: They are very much like temples, these houses seem to be built with antique hipped roofs (a style often used in temples), and there is a white-coloured sculpture in the courtyard!

We were very excited by the presence of this temple, which reminded us that perhaps Xingwuying had not been completely abandoned yet.

In full expectation, we finally arrived at the site of the ancient fortress of Xingwuying.

K: The Walls of the fortress seem to be in a similar condition to the Great Wall previously passed by, and it is hard to find traces of the complete bricks on the surface of the Wall.



Figure 28. The entrance of Xingwuying (Gu, 2018)
Location: Xingwuying, Yanchi, Ningxia, China

45. Xu, 2014, p.143

I: According to the records, Xingwuying was also built with earthen rammed Walls, and the outer layer was covered with brick and stone, but the bricks were removed during the Republican era and used to pave the road from Xingwuying to other cities⁴⁵. Look carefully, there are many shattered bricks spread on the ground, supposedly the leftovers from when the villagers stripped the bricks at the time. In contrast to the Great Wall in the form and shape of a small hill, here the Wall has more of a Wall-like formation and sense of compression. The Wall of the fortress appears to be as high as a three-storey building and has a smooth facade in many places, and it is standing straight out in front of my eyes like a slashed canyon, I feel like...its shadow could swell me up instantly.

K: Surprisingly, there were no fences around the Walls here.

Along with a collapsed platform, we climbed up to the Walls of the Xingwuying.



Figure 29. On the Wall of Xingwuying (Anonymous, 2019)
Location: Xingwuying, Yanchi, Ningxia, China

As we looked beyond the Walls, we found two Ming Great Walls with inconspicuous outlines to the north of the fortress. In the distance was the endless Maowusu Desert with sparse grasses spread out outside the fortress, while villages were faintly visible to the south. With the view retracted, there was only the square Walls and the empty land enclosed by them. The fortress was roughly in rectangular, with bridge piers on all four sides of the Wall.

I: It feels so different from the map, the Walls defined a natural boundary, where the atmosphere inside and outside was completely different. I could read this land now, even in the same context of weedy fields, the land enclosed by the Walls held memories. On closer inspection, there were many traces of buildings and cultivated land spread among the weeds.

K: I can see the traces of people who lived their lives here, traces of nature and time. This fortress is telling so many stories at the moment. What about its past? Was it built originally with the Great Wall next to it, from the Ming dynasty?



Figure 30. Bricks and stones next to the Wall (Gu, 2018)
Location: Xingwuying, Yanchi, Ningxia, China

46. Chen, 1981, p.253
47. Chen, 1981, p.253
48. Wang et al, 2006, p.36
49. Wang et al, 2006, p.36
50. Ai, 2017

I: Xingwuying already existed before it was built in the Ming Dynasty. According to the record of Jiajing Ningxia Xinzhi, there was a city in the past, and it was not known what dynasty and what name it had, but left the ruined site on one side, which was commonly called the half city⁴⁶. In the ninth year of the Zhengtong era (1444 AD), Jinlian, the imperial official, began to build the city and set up a guard on its old base⁴⁷. Researches on the predecessor of Xingwuying has been controversial. Based on the literature, the actual measurement data of the former city of Xingwuying, some researcher speculated that Xingwuying was built during the Tang Dynasty, and was one of the nine major towns established in the border areas to accommodate the Turkic conquests, known as Luzhou City⁴⁸. Later, with the change of dynasties, the military status of the city declined. At the end of the Tang Dynasty, the city inhabitants moved westward en masse, which left it empty. Then, after a hundred years of exposure to the harsh environment, the city had become so dilapidated that it was called the Half City⁴⁹. However, some scholars have argued that the conclusion of Xingwuying as the city of Luzhou is not sufficiently substantiated, and pointed out that there was no the city of Luzhou in the early Tang dynasty was not the former city of Xingwuying in the Ming dynasty⁵⁰. The location of the city is still an open question that should continue to be investigated and researched.

K: Nevertheless, it was confirmed that the claim of the half city is supported and that the land, together with parts of the Walls, had already experienced at least one urban boom and bust before became the Xingwuying fortress.



Figure 31. Locals collect bricks from Xingwuying (Anonymous, 2014)
Location: Xingwuying, Yanchi, Ningxia, China

I: This city has began with the soldiers and officers who came here to build the Great Wall, and with their construction of a new fortress based on the old one. Despite its military establishment, Xingwuying was a military cantonment and a civilian cantonment. During times without war, the soldiers and their families worked in the fields and rested. At that time, Xingyuying was considered to be a peaceful town, far from war. Nowadays, there still existed the ruins of several temples around the fortress.

K: I could imagine how important the temples were, particularly during the war period, the temples held a powerful symbol of support for people, who turned their fear of war and their helplessness in the face of the uncontrollable natural environment into an incentive to pray.

I: Exactly, visiting a temple and making a wish has been the most straightforward way since ancient times, believing that the deity who controlled everything would have mercy on them and would bless their lives with peace, good weather, and good harvests. People kept building temples as they built their lives, and when the cities died out, without the people's worship, the temples would have also died out soon. Because of the constant expectation and awe of living in the society that people built, there were traces of building temples and the traces and stories of the lives that people built.

K: Such a sense of life was still vaguely apparent in the fragments scattered among the grass, the bricks and the yellow soil. I am now more curious about the newly built temple.



Figure 32. The temple in the distance (Anonymous, 2018)
Location: Xingwuying, Yanchi, Ningxia, China

As we walked along the Wall, the temple gradually became visible. It was overly conspicuous and vibrant next to the monotonous Walls. From a distance, the bright yellow glazed tiles on the roof reflected the sunlight. The temple looked unpretentious, with many halls built around and red pillars lined up in rows. The sculpture in the courtyard surrounded by palaces that only appeared from a distance.

I: It has been common in the area to build temples, and not far from here there was an oil field where many of the owners were particularly superstitious. It was most sincere to spend the money to build a temple and pray for Buddha's blessing for them. Rather than investing the money elsewhere, it was better to pay for a Buddha to protect themselves and their business.

K: But the owner who built this temple had been thinking carefully, by choosing the site in the abandoned old fortress, taking on the will of the ancient city in general, the temple was like a new beginning and centre of the fortress. I was curious about who was looking after the temple now, if anyone was visiting and praying, or if they were as curious as I was about the new life in this abandoned fortress.

We followed the directions on the map and found the gate to the temple, but it was closed and no one responded inside. The temple stayed quietly within the fortress, as lonely as the Walls, in the desert.

The Alive One At The Moment

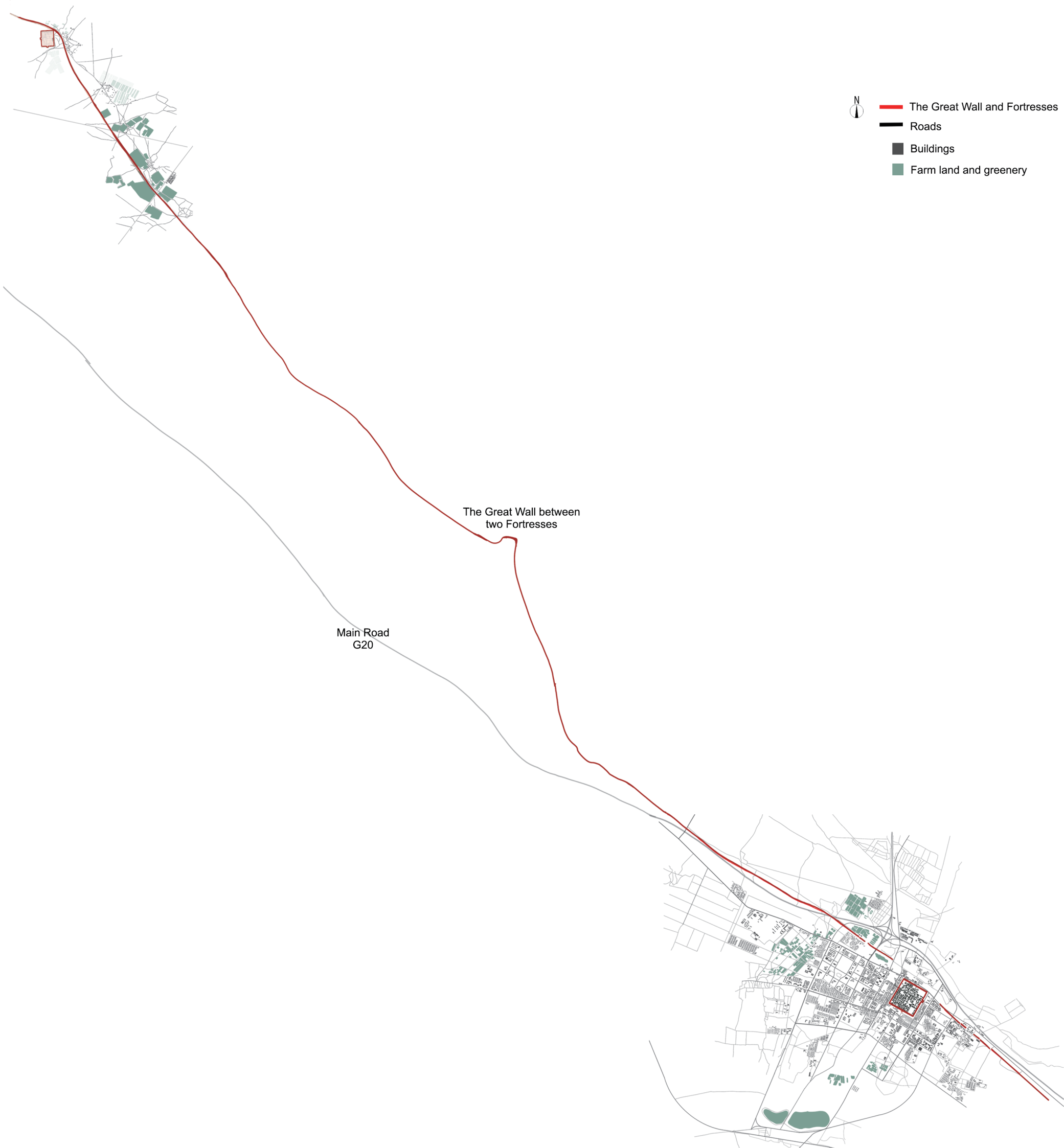


Figure 33. Map from Xingwuying to Huamachi (Yanchi) (Gu, 2021)



Figure 34. Map of Yanchi (Gu, 2021)

Before ending our journey, we decided to head to our final stop, Huamachi. In contrast to the Xingwuying, the Hanamachi fortress has grown over the centuries to become the centre of the region, with a population of nearly 170,000, and has been renamed Yanchi. Even during searches of the ancient Great Wall, both the surrounding scattered Wall and the abandoned Xingwuying were classified under the name of Yanchi. With increasing signposts and directions along the way, we reached Yanchi, a city that has still been alive from its founding to the present day. Like many other cities here, there were neatly planned roads with identical street lights at the same spacing, well-built green belts and rows of similar houses on either side of the road.

K: Well, this is a switch to city life. I mean, it's an entirely different atmosphere from the Great Wall and Xingwuying in the desert a while ago. From what we've just seen on this part of the road, no trace of the Great Wall can be found here. But if this current city was built and expanded on top of the original fortress, then there must be a place here that was enclosed by Walls hundreds of years ago, like the Xingwuying, right?

I: Although my homecity is not far from here, this is the first time I've been to Yanchi. I've heard that there are Walls in place here, but they were renovated over ten years ago, and I don't know how far they've been repaired, we could walk further into the city centre and see, maybe we could see the Walls.



Figure 35. The entrance to the new built Wall in Yanchi (Lin, 2019)
Location: Yanchi, Ningxia, China

We walked in the direction of the city centre for a while and then we saw the Wall. The Walls were still standing high, but instead of rammed earth Walls, the Wall was built by grey concrete bricks that in the same size and shape. As we got closer, the bricks were all arranged regularly; even the mortar were about the same width. Not only the Walls were modern, but a short distance away, there were some magnificent looking corner towers on the Walls.

K: So this is the Wall of Hanamachi; where's the earthen Wall? Were the earthen Walls like those in Xingwuying and the Great Wall park being torn down?

I: Yes, it looks like they just kept the position of the original Walls. It's interesting that when they advertise the city, they describe it has a 500-year-old Wall, but this Wall is a new Wall to anyone who looks at it. The good thing is that the new Wall is not fenced off, so let's find an entrance and have a look.

I: There is some introduction here. So after the year 2,000, the old Wall was torn down, and some of the good quality bricks were mixed into the new bricks to rebuild the Wall.



Figure 36. On the new built Wall in Yanchi (Lin, 2019)
Location: Yanchi, Ningxia, China

K: How familiar this story is, very much like the sheep pen next to the Great Wall. However, it's hard to see traces of the old bricks here. The new Wall is so massive that even if the old bricks are mixed in, all you can see is the clear new bricks.

I: I wonder if people are trying to preserve the name and history of the old Wall by using the new Wall, but the people who built and designed it didn't know what the old Wall was like. There were brief records in history books of the approximate size and length of the Walls, but who would know exactly what they looked like. The city has been evolving for centuries, and the new Walls certainly have to meet the needs of current urban planning. So rather than rebuilding the old Walls, they were actually building the new city Wall.

K: But what is the point of putting so much effort into it? Does the city now need to rebuild the Walls that were used to defend it in the old days?

I: Instead of saying that people and the city need the Wall, they need a powerful name and the rich history and culture that comes with the Wall. The meaning that the old city Wall and the Great Wall carried is enough in itself for people to take action, just like the hope that building the Wall in sections gives to the builders, or the temple built in Xingwuying with the hopes that it carries for the locals. That's probably why Yanchi advertises that they have a hundred-year-old city Wall and emphasizes that there are hundred-year-old bricks in the Wall.

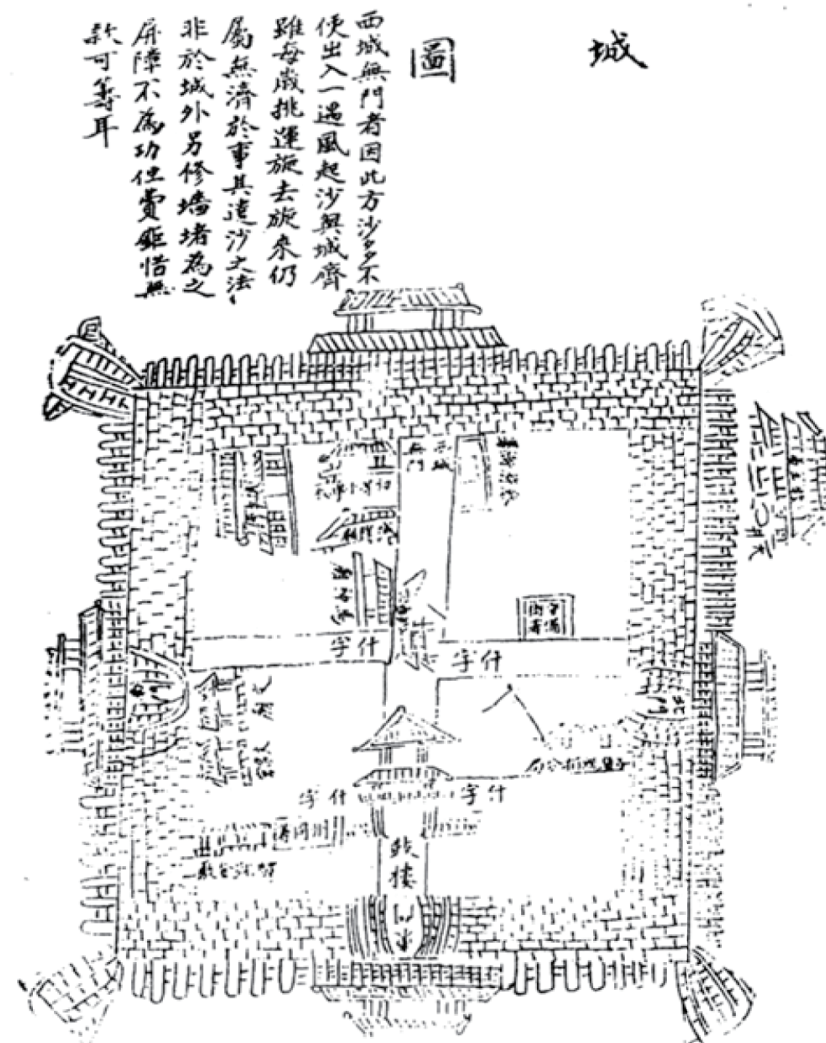


Figure 37, Map of Huamachi (Anonymous, 1907)

There are four corner towers and three gate towers in the Huamachi citadel. These are the East City Gatehouse, the South City Gatehouse and the North City Gatehouse. The road towards the western city is marked with the words Western City without Gate. The text above the map explains the reason that translated as: The city map. There is no gate in the western wall, so there is a lot of sand in the area, which makes it challenging to get in and out, and when the wind rises, the sand is on a level with the city. Although the sand is transported every year, it still does not help. The method of removing the sand could not be achieved without building another wall outside the city as a barrier, but the cost is enormous, and it is a pity that there is no money to raise.

K: Speaking of temples, we haven't seen any temples here, I guess.

I: Yes, it is a bit surprising, I've just checked there are no temples in the centre city of Yanchi nowadays, and the nearest temple is nearly 10 km from the city centre, basically on the edge of the city. I saw a city map of Hanamachi earlier, which was included in the *Huamachi Records* (1907) almost 100 years ago. This map illustrates four main types of institutional buildings, including government institutions, educational institutions (the Academy), religious institutions (the City God Temple, the Temple of Literature, and the Temple of the Horse God), and information and transportation (the Post Horse)⁵¹. Some researchers believe that these places of worship were considered public spaces from the scholars who wrote the records, as the city gods (the Taoist gods who guarded the city) enshrined in the city god temples became prominent from the Ming dynasty onwards⁵². The Ming emperors paid great attention to the worship of the gods. The worship took place at the City God Temple, with the god of the city as the officiant. The content of the worship was mainly to hope that the non-sacrificial gods would understand the people's feelings and discriminate between the faithful and the wicked, as declared by the city gods, to promote good and punish evil⁵³. Here, the gods and goddesses of the city became a source of self-reflection for the people and a mysterious monitor of public sentiment under the official system⁵⁴. But at the same time, the temples also carry the daily beliefs of the local people, especially in a small and troubled border town like Huamachi, where the people need such spaces to rely on, even if the religious buildings themselves represent the domination of the people by their higher authorities.

- 51. Hu and Han, 2018, p.178
- 52. Ge, 2006, p.67
- 53. Gao, 2011, p.39
- 54. Hu and Han, 2018, p.179



Figure 38. The city slogan on the Wall in Yanchi (Lin, 2019)
The text on the slogan translated as: Work in practice, walk in the forefront, strive to create a new era of Yanchi's development
Location: Yanchi, Ningxia, China

55. Kafka, 2015, p.347
56. Kafka, 2015, p.347

K: So today there are basically no temples in Yanchi because the people here don't rely on them as much as they used to, and the superiors can't dominate the people through temples, but it seems that the people here have also inadvertently passed on their reliance on hope to the city Walls.

I: So the temples don't need to be rebuilt, but the Walls do. Did you notice that the Walls here are very much like the tower at the entrance to the Great Wall heritage park that we first arrived at in our trip, the one that we guessed would lead to the Babel tower underground?

K: Yeah, not only does it look a lot like a tower, but the process of building the Wall also looks like the process of building the Babel Tower. When the Tower of Babel was first built, people focused heavily on signposts, translators, workers' accommodation and road connections, as if hundreds of years could be spent building the Tower, and the argument was put forward that the most important thing in the whole picture was the idea of building a Tower to the sky, and that everything else was secondary to that idea⁵⁵. Thus, rather than constantly building the Tower of Babel, it's more important that people start building their own lives. In the meantime, conflicts arose, like wars or confrontations between things and nature, and life was shattered. At the time of the truce, people built their city districts more beautifully, attracting jealousy and causing new conflicts⁵⁶. This was pretty much the case for every generation living there, people either leave or build new cities on top of the old ones and start a new life.

I: Just like at Xingwuying and Huamachi, where the construction of the Great Wall was just the beginning, people slowly built up their lives along the Wall, constructing all kinds of buildings, either governmental buildings or temples. Then conflicts arose, and while Xingwuying was gradually abandoned because of its natural conditions, but Huamachi was rebuilt. The life and death of city revolves around the building of Walls again and again, in a continuous cycle with the long stream of time, alternating between life and death. From the time the two fortresses were part of the Great Wall, Huamachi and Xingwuying have been in this cycle of life and death. Today the Huamachi is still maintained in a state of life, while the new Walls of the Xingwuying may have been quietly rebuilt in a corner.

CHAPTER 4
THE CEREMONY

INTRODUCTION

- In this chapter, the ceremony started. We met many other participants and shared their stories with the Wall, we found out the content of the ceremony and celebrate with the others. And after the celebration, we were in vain and we decided to make something for the Wall, together with the others.

The Tickets



Figure 39. Bricks and stones fallen from the Wall (Gu, 2018)
Location: Xingwuying, Yanchi, Ningxia, China

On the day of the ceremony, K and I arrived at the entrance of the Great Wall heritage park. We met many people who had also been invited to the ceremony, including visitors who had travelled from far away, the ones who had lived in the area and had now moved to other cities. We even met the family worked in the entrance restaurant. Everyone came together and wanted to witness the ceremony.

K: Finally, the day has come, and after seeing the Wall, I am even more curious about the upcoming ceremony. Furthermore, about the tickets to start this ceremony, do you think we have found them?

I: We have walked many places in the last few days, and we have passed and seen along the way, whether it is the newly built restaurant towers, the remains of the segmented Great Wall, the sheep pens made of Great Wall bricks, the ancient fortress Xingwuying, the temples in the ancient fortress, the new Wall in Yanchi, all of these we have seen carried the meanings of the Great Wall. All of them are part of the Great Wall, and I think our tickets are there with them.

K: So the invitation says we have to find our own tickets, which should mean we have to find a connection between the Wall and us to launch this ceremony. What could your ticket be?

I: According to my experiences, there is no better representation of the Wall than the bricks and stones scattered all over the place. Each of us is like a brick that has fallen from the Wall, either scattered in place or moved away to a distance of a thousand miles from the Great Wall. When we are called again by other large projects, we are organised to build new constructions again elsewhere, and we are all building the new Great Wall after another, carrying on the construction of the Wall.



Figure 40. The gap of the Wall, for the road (Gu, 2019)
Location: The Great Wall heritage park, Yanchi, Ningxia, China

K: For me, perhaps it was the gap in the segmental Wall, and it was because of this gap, I began to think about the meaning of building the Wall. Of course, the gap is the space between the Walls. However, behind the formation of the gap, it is also the strategies that the construction of the Wall used to manage the builders. To put it another way, I, myself, am a representative of this gap.

I: I think the purpose of this whole ticket search thing is not only to make us more aware of our connection to the Wall, but also to bring us together, people with all different backgrounds, identities, ages and genders, we all being here for the same reason, and that is the Great Wall.

K: It sounds as if we are gathered here to rebuild the Wall.

I: That is not necessarily the case; we do not know what the ceremony is about until now. So, I think we have our tickets, how do we start this ceremony?

K: Let us walk along the Wall and collect some shattered bricks and stones along the way and see what everyone else's tickets could be. At some point, we will know how to launch the ceremony.

The Rituals



41/43 Figure 41. Ancient coins found under the Walls (Anonymous, 2014)
42/44 Figure 42. The local house built with Great Wall bricks (Anonymous, 2014)
Figure 43. The local well built with Great Wall bricks (Anonymous, 2014)
Figure 44. Stones under the Wall (Anonymous, 2014)

We consciously collected pieces along the way and noticed that many people passing by were also collecting, many with bags of broken bricks and stones, others with branches and even one man with a pair of scissors to cut a piece of the green fence off. As well as the apparent evidence of the Wall's relationship, we saw people taking photographs, others standing between the two sections of the Wall with recorders, and others setting up a stereo and playing music by the Wall.

We stopped and decided to listen to their stories.

I: That couple, who used to be the caretakers of that newly built temple in Xingwuying. Both local people with limited education got the job a few years ago, maintaining the facilities in the temple, picking up the temple's rubbish, and clearing the weeds from the Walls. At that time, the income from just looking after the temple in a year was enough to support their lives for a whole year. Later, when the owner said they were no longer needed to look after the temple, they moved out. They still have the key to the main gate with them today, but I don't know if they can still open the temple's door.

K: The old man sitting there was carrying several coins from ancient times. He said he had dug them out of the Wall when he was a boy; many of the coins were hundreds of years old. He said he had lived around here since he was a child and had watched the Great Wall get smaller and narrower. In previous years, when there was no fence, he would pick up pieces of stone from the roadside whenever he saw them and put them back in the cracks on the Wall. Over the years, he has moved to the neighbouring village and got a better living condition, but his children have been away from home for many years, and he felt that he was now an old person like the Great Wall, sooner or later being abandoned and forgotten.

I: And the man who had been yelling, can you imagine, he actually brought over a big bucket of water from his own well. He said that his well was built by his previous generation with good bricks stripped from the Great Wall, and that it had been used for so many years that the well was still in good quality. He was so proud that he wanted everyone to taste the water from the well made by Great Wall bricks.

K: The children were even more interesting as they did not seem to know that the Great Wall in front of them was actually connected to the Great Wall at Badaling in Beijing, which is the nice brick one from TV and media. They said they wanted to go to Beijing and see Tiananmen Square and the actual Great Wall. The Great Wall should be like Badaling. The earthen Wall here could not be considered a real Great Wall.

...



Figure 45. A stele next to the road (Gu, 2019)
Location: The Great Wall heritage park, Yanchi, Ningxia, China

Many people and stories were associated with the Great Wall, those who resonated with it, who came specifically to commemorate it, who pitied it, and those who mocked it. As more and more people gathered, people slowly and naturally began to share their experiences with the Great Wall to others around them, sharing their reasons for coming here. Some were hesitant to stop and move on; others stood around the Wall in a group and began to share and talk. The small groups either laughed, cried, complained, angry and occasionally argued.

I: Some of the staff there who had been involved in the conservation of the Great Wall were particularly angry after hearing the story of the man who took the bricks to build the well. They criticised the man who took the bricks quite harshly, saying that he had no awareness of the conservation of the Great Wall and that such precious Great Wall bricks had just become his family's well, and the staff said that if it were done now they would certainly be arrested.

K: I also heard them discussing about the conservation of the Great Wall, and many of them were complaining that the Great Wall was not being protected properly. They said that the fences that had been built over the years did not provide enough protection at all, apart from blocking people from looking at the Wall more closely. The fences were not high enough or strong enough to protect the Wall from the elements, or even to stop people trying to climb over the fence, who can always do so without much effort.

I: I have heard other people complained that the Great Wall conservation authorities were not doing a good job of promoting the Great Wall. For instance, the conservation department had erected a very small stone stele next to many of the Walls with the general name of the Great Wall and the conservation department on it, which made people feel that erecting this stone stele was the most important conservation work. How would people who come to the site know that these earthen mounds were the Great Wall if they accidentally missed the stone stele? Some of the conservators looked particularly upset to hear the criticism of their work, retorting that they already had done a lot of researches.



Figure 46. The visit platform in the Terra-Cotta Warrior Museum (News China, 2018)
Location: The Terra-Cotta Warrior Museum, Shanxi, China

K: Have they discussed any solutions for the preservation of the Great Wall?

I: A lot, some said that the Great Wall should be kept in a transparent sealed glass, enclosure and displayed like an exhibit in a historical museum. Others said there should be a special indoor exhibition hall, with a raised visiting platform where people could stand and walk along the Great Wall, like the Terra-Cotta Warrior Museum.

K: They all sounds like big projects.

I: Yes, and there were many suggestions that the Wall should be restored to its original form, at least with the outer layer of bricks re-wrapped. In any case the more it looked like the Badaling Great Wall in the traditional style the better, so that it would be more convincing to the public that this was also the Great Wall of great renown. There was some talk of making the Great Wall reconstruction project as big as possible, preferably of a national kind, involving every citizen, so that everyone would be proud to build the Great Wall great again.

K: Everyone! It seems that people are really aiming for something much bigger. Watching the discussion about the Great Wall get louder and louder, it looks like there is already an atmosphere of the ceremony.

I: So the celebrations have already started!



Figure 47. People gather in different groups to discuss the Great Wall (Gu, 2021)

At that moment, the overall calm was broken by a shout from a distance. Several young men were seen climbing over the fence and straight up to the Wall. A few people stood by the Wall and started cheering, saying that the Wall was built to be climbed and that there was no point in fencing it off like that. At first, there were some oppositional voices around, but gradually, as the people's cheers grew louder and louder, the faint voices of opposition faded into the crowd. People gradually dropped their hands of stones, buckets, photos and other tickets proving their connection to the Wall and began to gather towards the fence. The originally thin green fence was easily knocked down by the crowd and trampled underfoot. Amidst a chorus of cheers, more and more people climbed up the Wall and stood on its thin spine.

Some of them gave an analysis to the ones nearby as they climbed. They felt that these fences were indeed redundant; the Xingwuying Fortress was considered part of the Great Wall; how come they had not seen it fenced off for so many years. Besides, these fences did not keep out the wind or the rain, so what were they doing there. It was not like a few decades ago when everyone was poor, and nowadays, they would buy concrete bricks if they wanted them, so who would take bricks from these Walls.

Others said that the Wall was going to disappear anyway, and that our climbing up today would not affect that result at all.

The masses were clearly pleased with this rhetoric, and it was as if everyone had been given some sense of divine mission and the need to end the life of the construction in front of them by themselves. People at first just gently stroked the earthen walls and the raised stones, while others spoke with their ears close to the Walls, trying very hard to hear something. As more and more people stepped onto the Wall, they turned reckless, and the faint sound of music rang out from several places, then the sound growing louder with the shouts of people who began to sing and dance on the Wall. Some people casually plucked weeds from the Wall that were in the way and kicked scattered stones off the Wall. Some people joined forces to push aside the large rocks in the way and then jumped into the Wall for a visit, which the hole was once hollowed out by the shepherds. They stretched their hands out of the holes to cheer the people down the Wall. Some people even lit fires directly at the Wall with collected weeds and branches, and in the distance, there was even the sound of people shouting slogans and pushing against the Wall.



Figure 48. Crowds of revelers (Gu, 2021)

All at once, the dust was blowing, the sand in the air was mixed with all sorts of noises. People were in complete revelry.

Even when a piece of the shaky Wall couldn't carry the cheering crowd, and it collapsed with a crash. After a moment's silence, the crowd pulled up those who had fallen into the mound, patted the dust from their bodies and continued their celebrations. People had forgotten the Wall beneath their feet and forgot the reason why they had come here, and the mass revelry covered up all the unease and panic and pity for the Wall. It was like a revolution with the Wall, as if people had given up on everything, even destroying everything in front of them, as if only after destroying it would they have the hope and courage to restart.

We looked at what was happening in front of us and did not know what to say or do until we were pushed towards the Walls by the excited people. I looked back at the stones that I collected and dropped on the ground along the way, then turned to join the ceremony.

The End

Without knowing how long it would take for the sounds of the celebrations to fade away, as the cheers, the noise and the singing became quieter and quieter, and the people lowered their voices gradually. Slowly, the desert became so quiet that the sound of birds hovering in the sky could be heard. The sand billowing in the sky cleared, and many people finally saw the scene of the land after the ceremony.

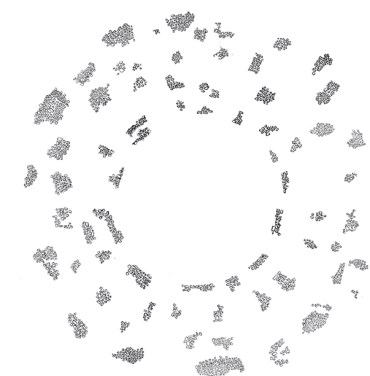
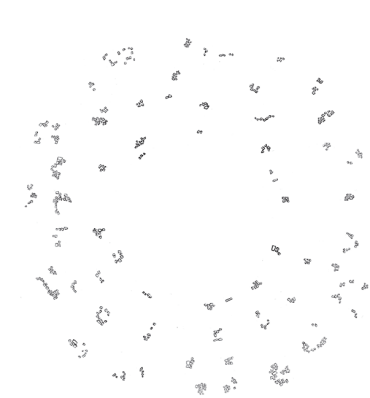
Many of the Walls had fallen, and the rammed earth pieces that had fallen down had been trampled by the people. Stones, bricks, fences that had been knocked down and trampled out of shape with the odd things that people had brought with them were scattered all over the deserted earth.

Some people were content to leave with their hands clapping, others rushed away with terrifying faces, while many more had obviously never experienced this scene before and just stood there with frozen faces, thinking about what had just happened, afraid to leave, but equally afraid to stay here.

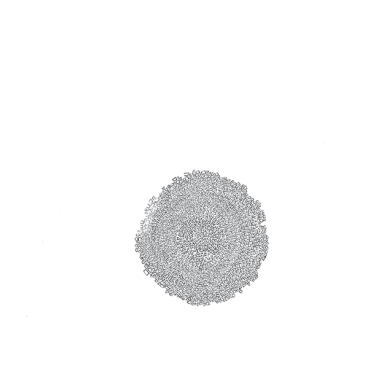
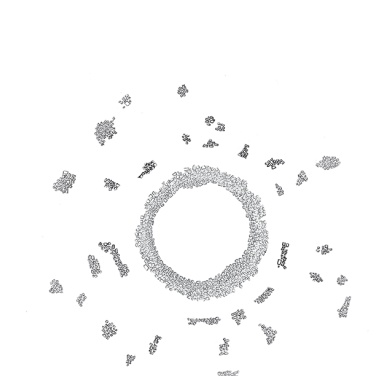
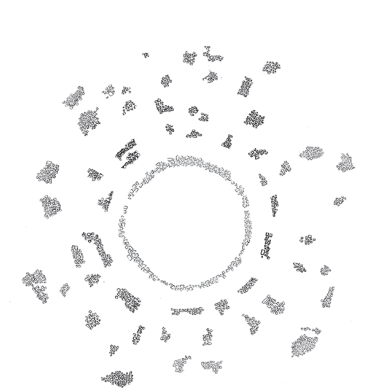
Not knowing who broke the silence first, a few people silently lifted the fence and stacked it together, while others silently picked up the stones and bricks that had fallen around the Wall and then piled them at the foot of it. After a moment of hesitation, many others joined in, bowing their heads and wordlessly picking up the stones and collecting them aside. The empty, silent ground resounded with the crisp sound of stones clashing and stacking up.

Some people kept collecting the stones and bricks scattered on the ground, while others simply mixed some of the soil alongside and stacked the stones and bricks as neatly as possible. These pieces of what had been part of the Wall were paved into small squares of various shapes, stacked into piles of stones, and even some Walls of varying heights.

Once the Walls were sorted out, many people simply said goodbye to those around them and left in a hurry.



People collect,
they form into different groups
And each group is getting bigger.



With the stones they collected
People start paving the ground from the outside to the inside.
The stones become the square

Figure 49. The process of paving (Gu, 2021)



Figure 50. Collecting and paving after the revelry (Gu, 2021)

K: Shall we go further? I wonder what Xingwuying is like now.

Along the way, we passed many deserted scenes left unorganised, people in the process of tidying up, and all sorts of Walls, piles of stones, and squares made of stones. On arriving at Xingwuying, we found that there were fewer signs of the ceremony. Several of the Walls had collapsed, but the overall appearance was not significantly different from before.

I: It might because the Xingwuying was too far away, and there was not enough energy for people to support the group to get here.

K: It's possible, and the fortress Walls were otherwise a bit higher and thicker, and there hadn't been a fence before, so even people who came here would have had enough trouble climbing up.

I: There's still a lot of stone and bricks left here that haven't been sorted out. Should we do something from them?

K: What else can we do? What else do you think the Great Wall needs us to do?

I: I feel that this is the last time I will see this Great Wall in person. Before we can say farewell, I think we can build a gravestone or more like a monument for it. Just like the other stone piles and squares left here, the Great Wall here deserves a monument for those who might come here in the future.

K: What would it look like?

I: I think the monument is right in the centre of the Fortress. Since the Fortress is made up of four Walls, the monument is also made up of four simple Walls. The four corners of the monument are positioned right against the four fortress Walls, and the intersection of each two Walls tightens a little, finally leaving only the space where one person stands and a gap through which only the line of sight can pass at the intersection.

K: The monument is a small fortress; people come in from all directions. And the entrances can be left in the middle of the four monument Walls. When they get to the centre of the monument, they will find that there are four corners where we can see the Fortress in gaps.

I: The four standing observation points for just one standing position of each are like four separate windows, through the gaps, people cannot see the entirety of the massive Fortress Walls, and the person standing here can take the time to look carefully at a specific part of the Fortress Wall and observe the relationship between that part with the sky and land or even the people or animal standing on top, by a distance, and I think that would be enough.

K: How about from the entrances, the midpoint of the four Walls, where our shortest Wall rises gradually in height towards the four observation corners - the four corners being the highest points of the monument.

I: Our Walls could also be built as curved that contract towards the four corners in a soft shape, creating each observation point for just one person. And the person standing here will not be disturbed by the surroundings. It will be a private space and time exclusively for that person and the Great Wall. But let's see how can we build it.

K: I'll go and find more building materials.

The people around us who hadn't left yet also decided to stay and help us build the monument after hearing our idea. The old villagers also brought in a cart with yellow clay and tools for building local houses, and we mixed it with the stones and bricks and built the monument layer by layer, with the same method people used to build the Great Wall.

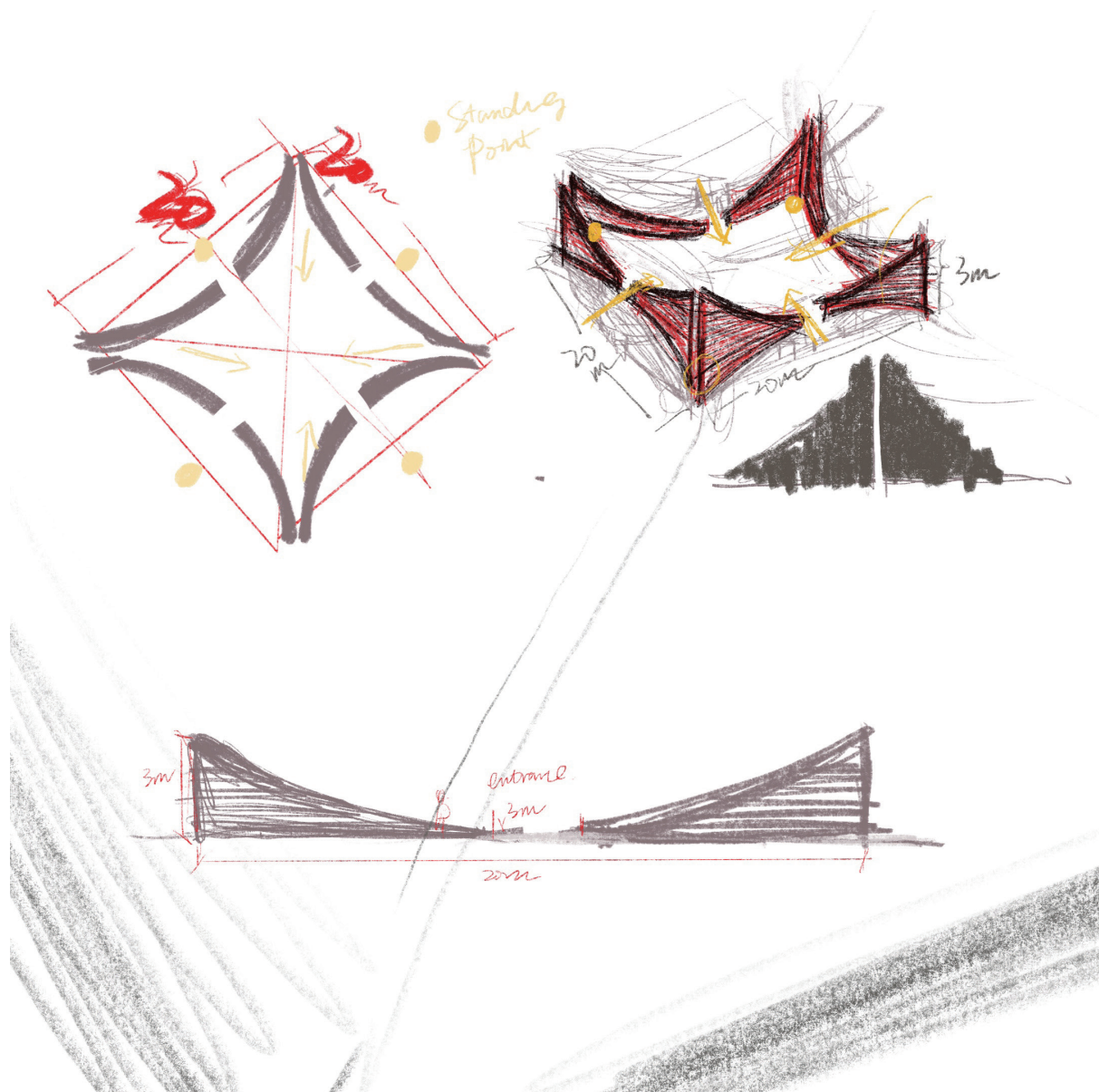
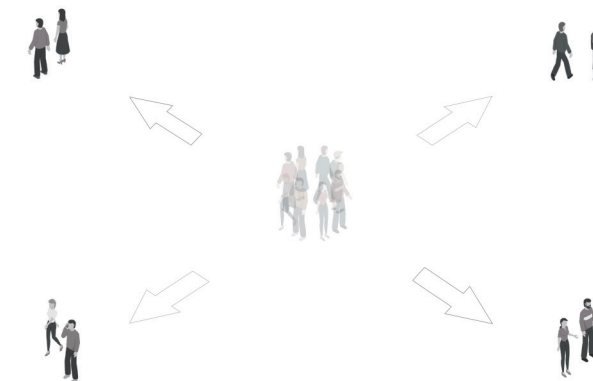


Figure 51. Ideas of the monument (Gu, 2021)

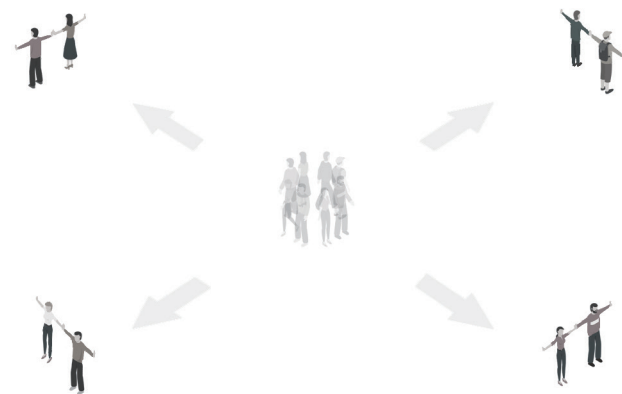


We split into four groups of two and after approximately locating the centre of the fortress, we stand at the center and each group face the four corners of the fortress.

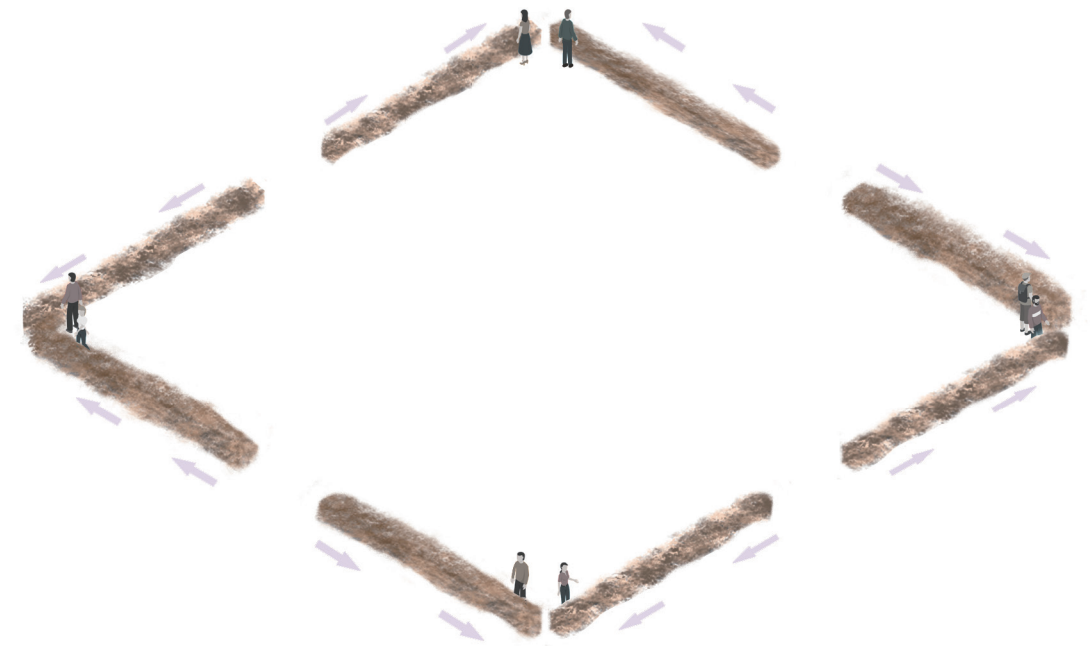


We set off at the same time towards the corner we were facing, each of us stopping after about 20 paces.

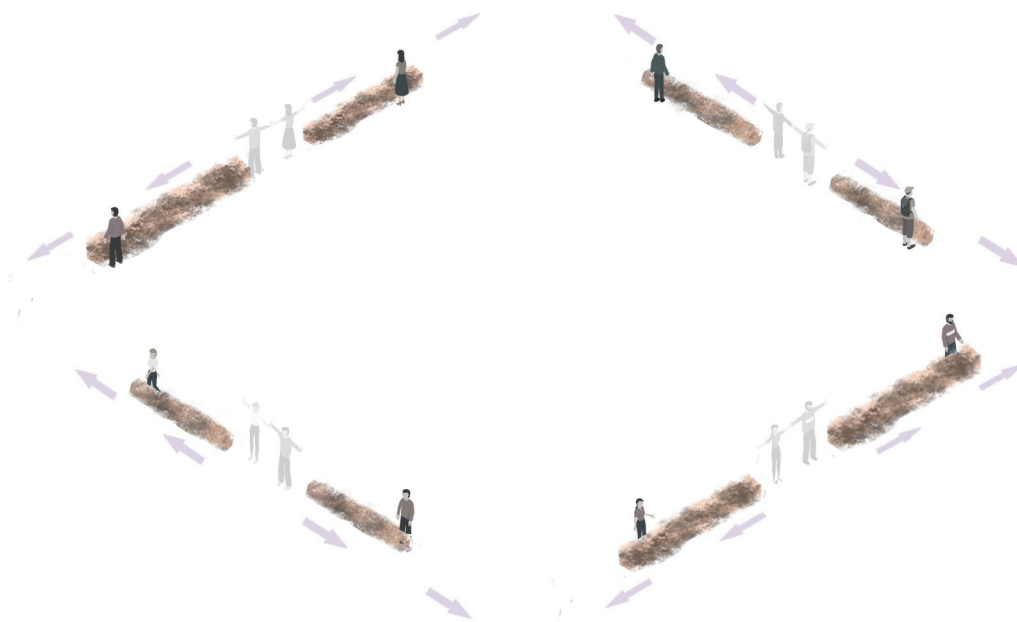
Figure 52. The process of building the monument (Gu, 2021)



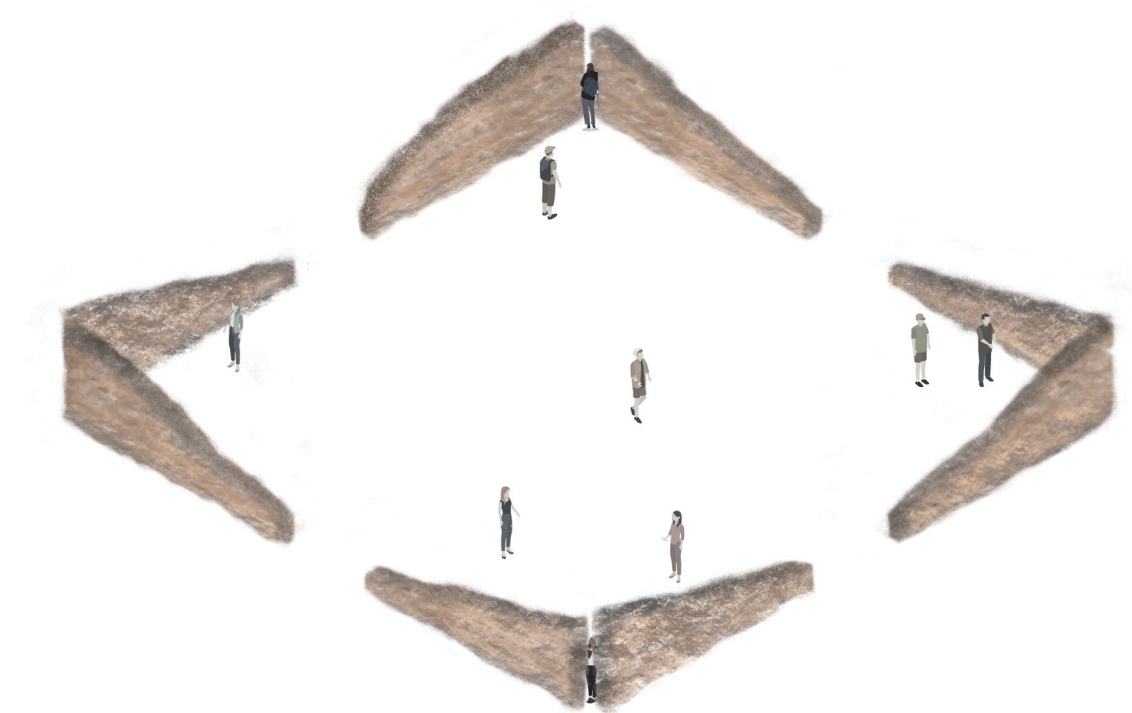
After reaching it, we spread our arms to reserve the entrance of the monument, with two people from each group standing at each of the two points where the arms are spread.



We start to build a wall in a straight line until the Wall met the neighboring partner's Wall with a small gap.



Then each group of two people, back to back, each responsible for one Wall,



The Walls are higher at the four corners for the private observation points. The Walls are lower at the entrances, to create a wider and easy entrance.

Figure 53. The process of building the monument (Gu, 2021)

Figure 54. The process of building the monument (Gu, 2021)

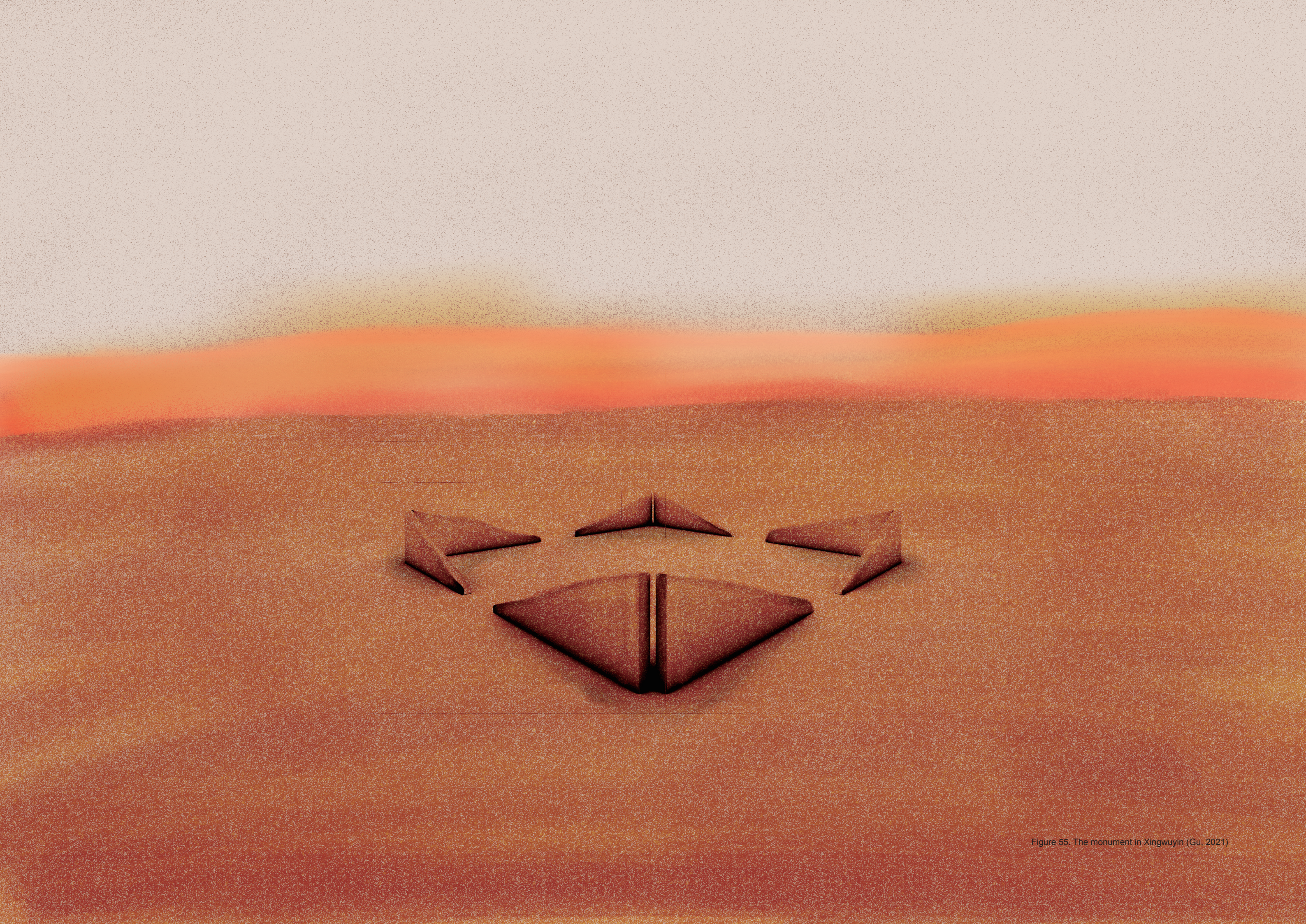


Figure 55. The monument in Xingwuyin (Gu, 2021)

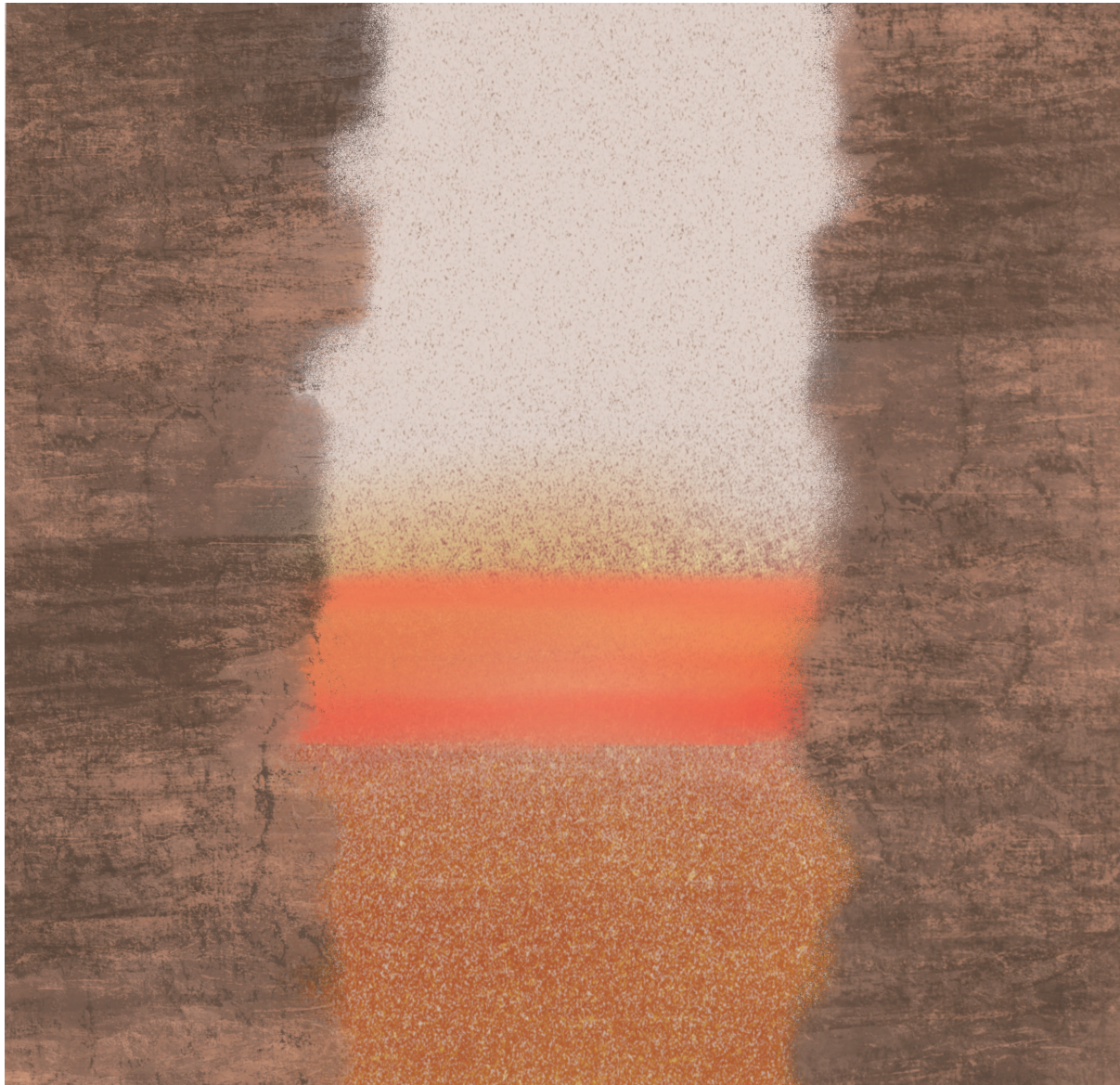


Figure 56. A view of Xingwuying from the monument (Gu, 2021)

Before we left, we took one last look at the freshly built monument, the yellow Walls were not dry and there was still a smell of mud around us. The bricks and stones were lying quietly in the yellow earth, gazing silently at the land, just like the Wall in the distance.

K: If the Great Wall is about to disappear, what do you think will happen to the pieces left behind by the ceremony?

I: I think they will stay here, and in the future, the place may become a forest, with many of these stones and squares are hidden in the mud and grass. Or if it becomes a desert, the bricks will be buried under the sand, and one day the wind will blow, and they might be exposed to the sun. Or perhaps it would become a city full of tall buildings, and these works would be hidden in the streets, and many people would pass by them every day. If the monument is lucky enough to remain here, those who come here may see the forest, the desert, or the city from four gap windows. The grass may grow among the stones, and the bricks may once again be taken away to build new projects, but they have left their marks here, as has the Great Wall did here. They are a witness, looking silently at the new Great Walls that will be built on this land in the future.

K: It's time for us to go; I think my trip on the Great Wall can be concluded here.

I: Our ceremony can finish here too. Farewell, the Great Wall.

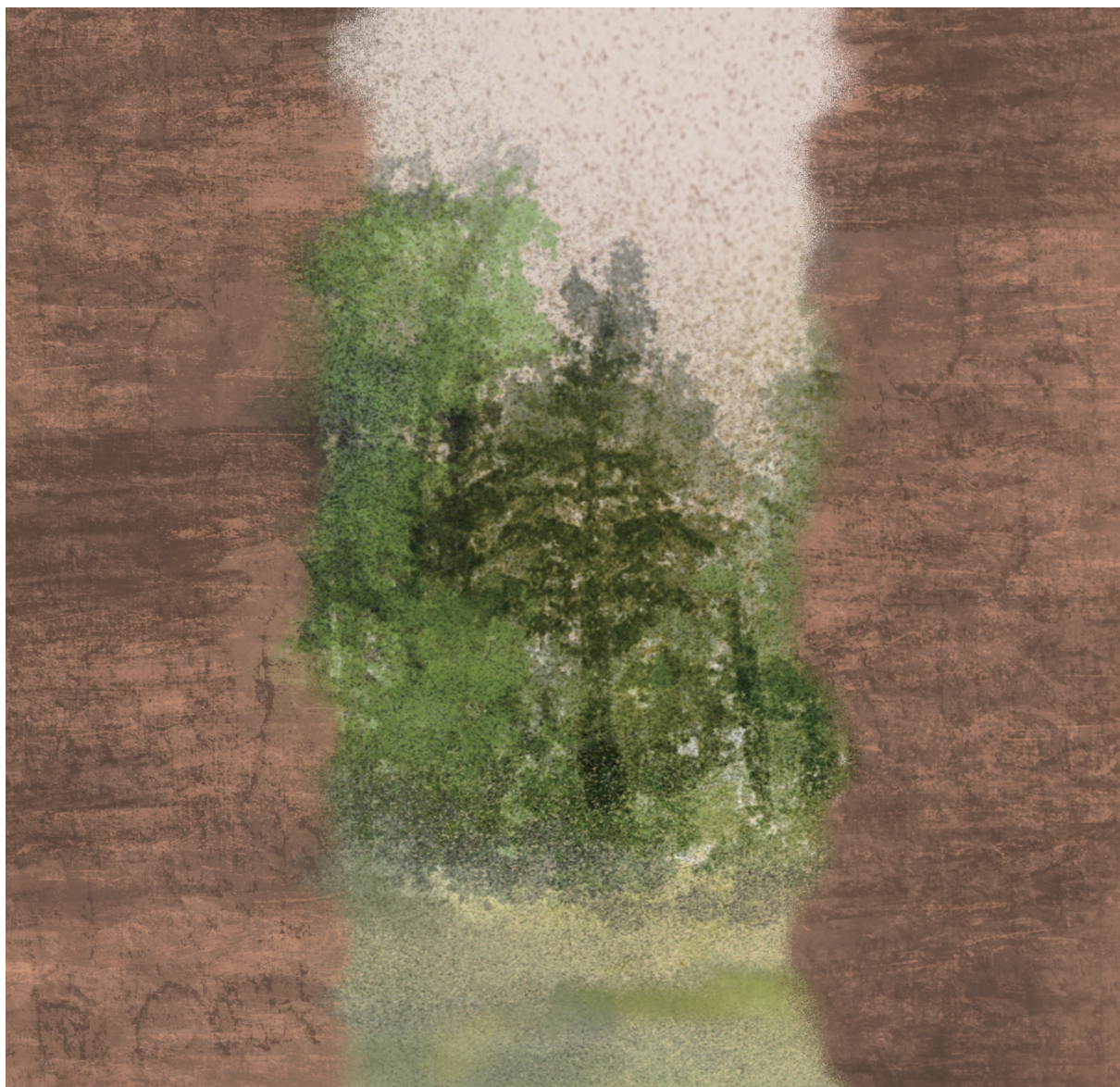


Figure 57. A view of the forest from the monument (Gu, 2021)



Figure 58. The monument in the forest (Gu, 2021)

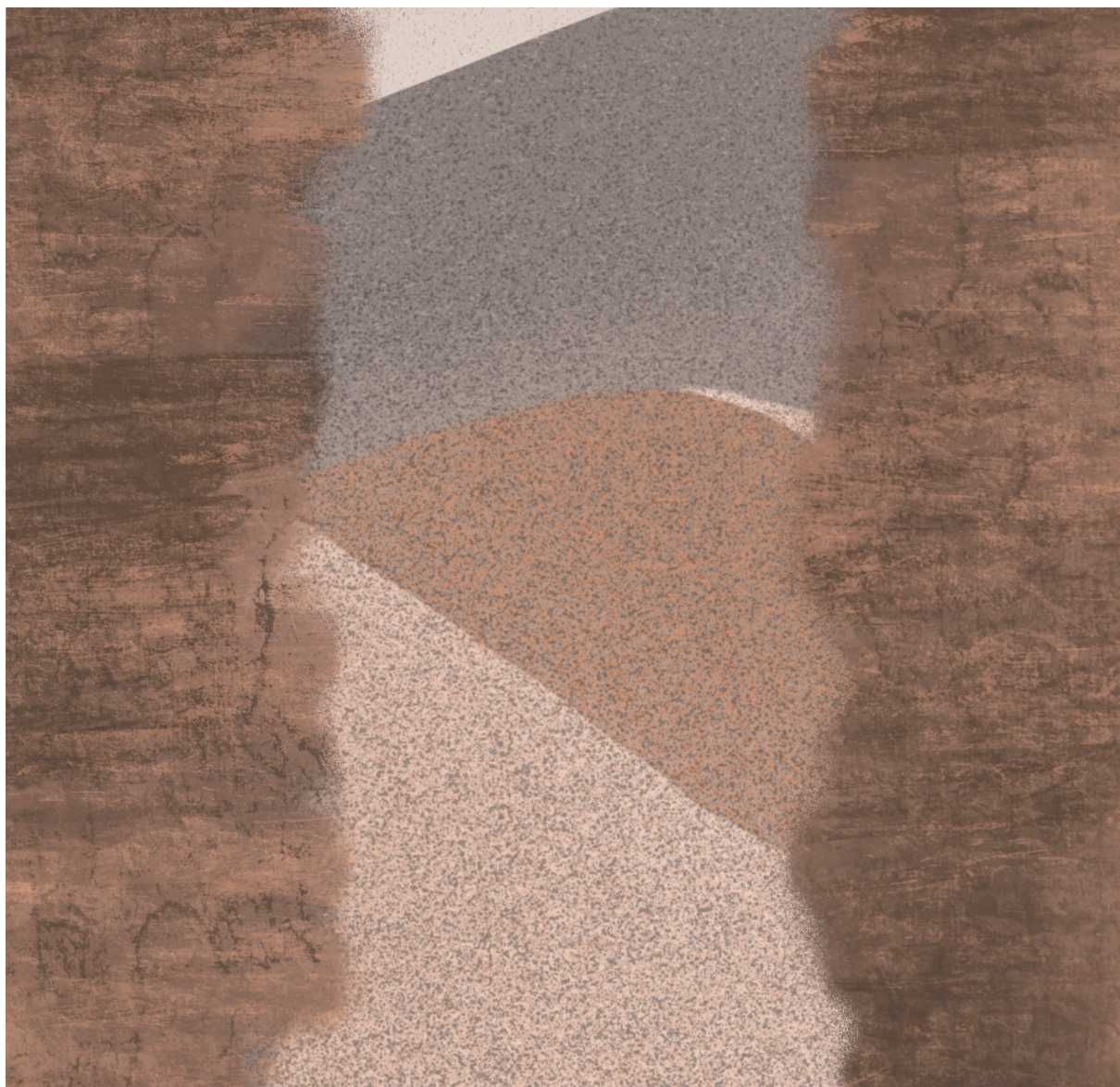


Figure 59. A view of the desert from the monument (Gu, 2021)



Figure 60. The monument in the desert (Gu, 2021)

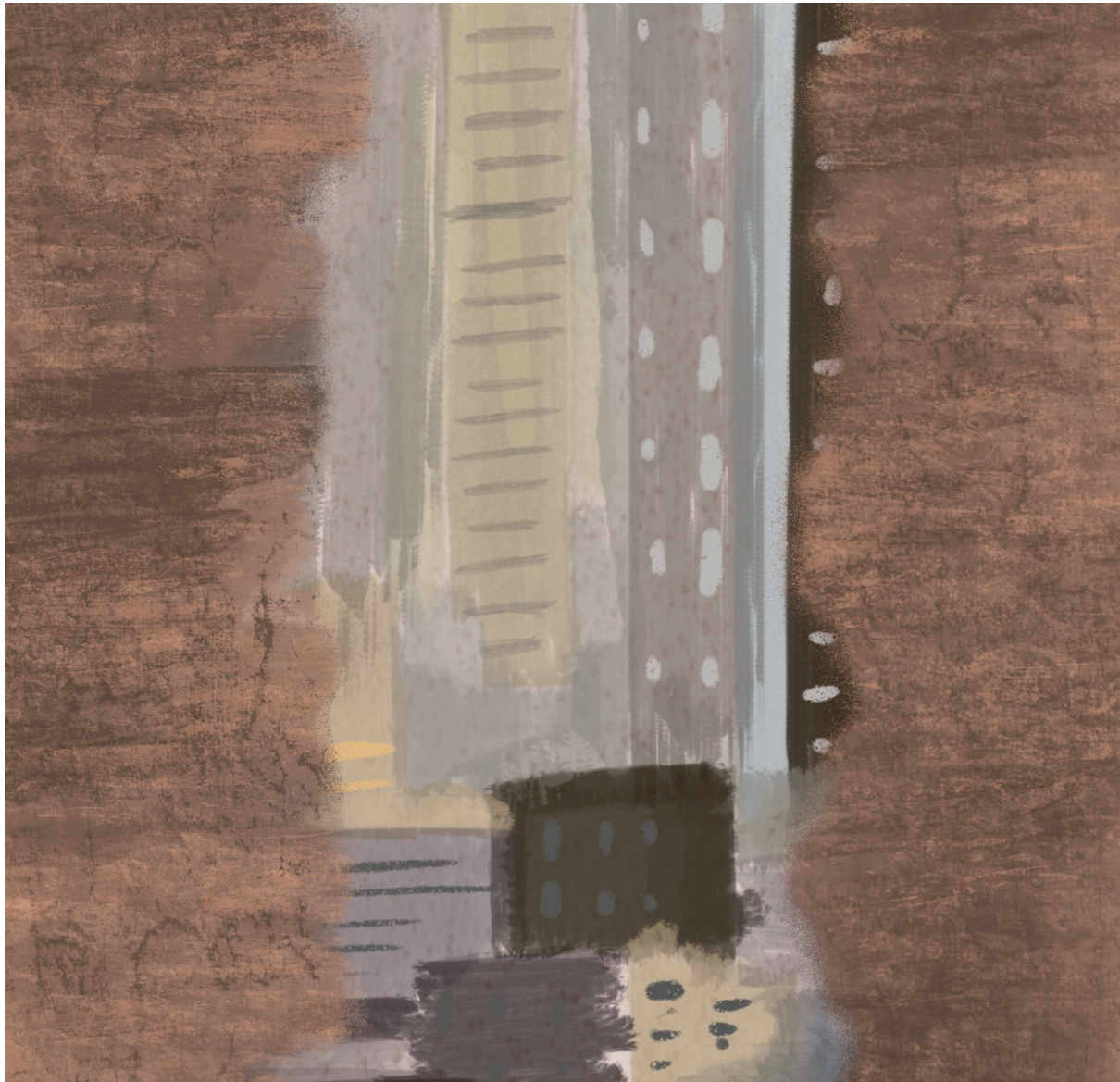


Figure 61. A view of the city from the monument (Gu, 2021)



Figure 62. The monument in the city (Gu, 2021)

EPILOGUE

A LETTER TO K

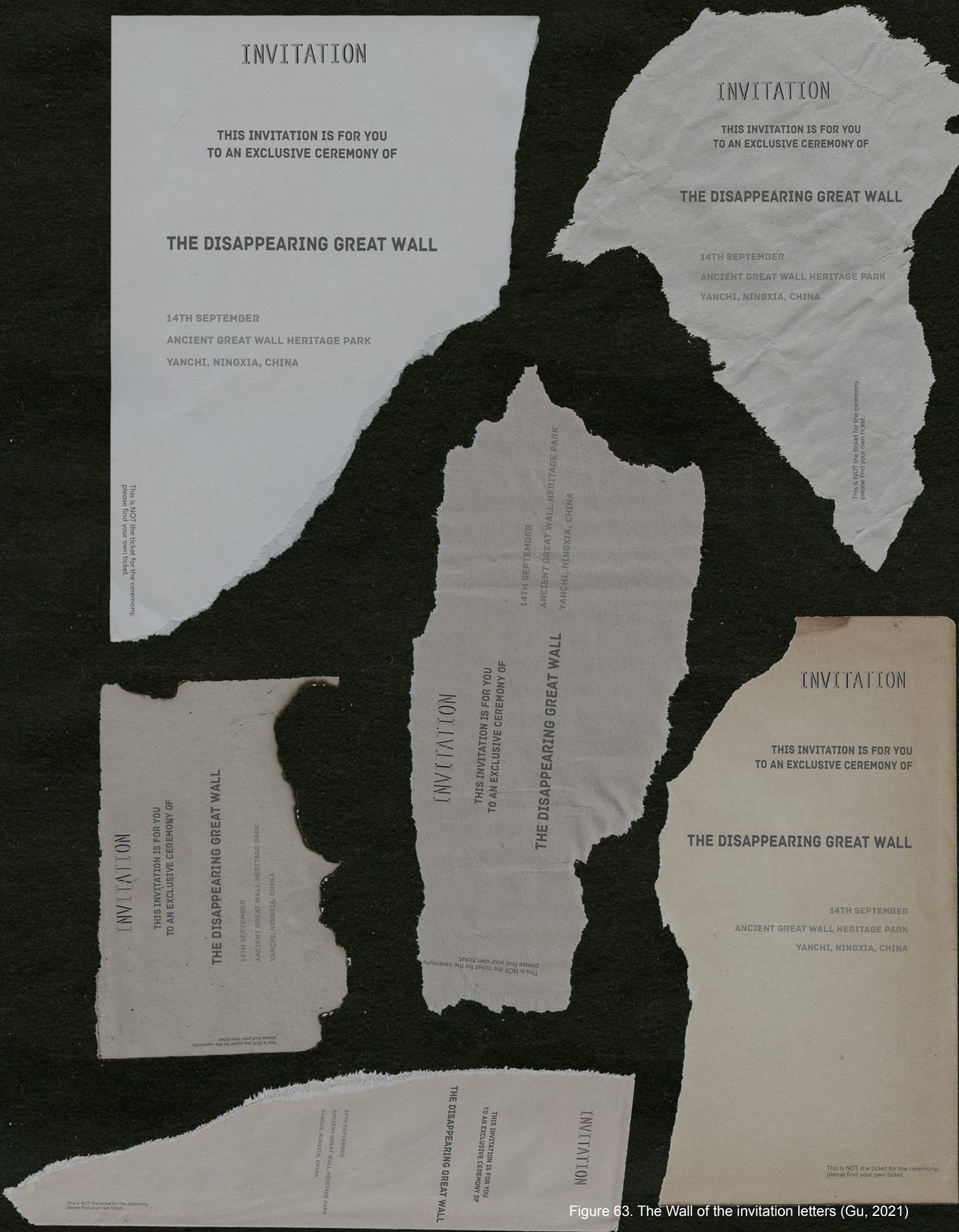


Figure 63. The Wall of the invitation letters (Gu, 2021)

Dear K,

How are you doing these days?

It has been a long time since we had a quick goodbye on the Great Wall trip.

I was recently tidying up and accidentally found the invitation, not just mine but several others that I had picked up along the way at the end of the ceremony. The pieces of paper were scattered across my desk, and I surprisingly realised that each invitation was like an incomplete brick that could be put together like a free puzzle. However, I didn't have many invitations on hand, so they could only be scattered and formed into a small Wall. As I looked at the invitation Wall, I kept remembering the ceremony and our previous journey.

I sporadically remembered many of the places we first visited together at the time, the mysterious tower, the broken Great Wall and the sheep pens, and the stories of constant construction and destruction of the Wall. We discussed how the Great Wall was a representation of nothing more than massive human construction, to which humanity has an irresistible attraction and obsession. I was also reminded of that lonely chair facing a segmented section of the Wall, the chair where we talked about the strategy of segmental construction that you had been involved in and the planning of the participants that this strategy represented. The people involved in the construction project find their place in the project and get their needs fulfilled; the project of building the Wall needs people, and people need to build the Wall.

In addition to the Great Wall, there were the two fortresses with different fates. It was first the abandoned Xingwuying and the newly built temple inside, which we did not get to visit until we left. And the vibrant Huamachi, with its new name and newly built Walls in the city. The different destinies of the two fortresses made us feel very emotional at the time, but the two fortresses are just at different junctions in the cycle of time, the so-called life and death are alternating, the Great Wall will be destroyed and rebuilt over and over again.

We concluded after the journey that the Great Wall represents the large-scale projects that need to be completed in different eras, but also a symbol of humanity's desire for massive constructions, and that people are willing to gather to build and destroy the Wall to fulfil their needs in a collective behaviour. This process is constantly cyclical and repetitive in different contexts from different times.

57. Kafka, 2015, p.319

I still remember when we were discussing the segmental construction method, you mentioned that the Empire built the Wall to defend against invaders from the north, the legendary invaders had terrifying faces, but no one had ever seen them in real life₅₇. So who exactly were our enemies? Although we did not continue to discuss this question at the time, I often think about it these days.

Back in the days when the Great Wall was built, it was thought that the magnificent construction of the Wall was sufficient protection against invasion. Nevertheless, it is pretty easy to confuse the protection with the enclosure. The more people get used to being in this protected and safe condition, the stronger the fear of the unknown beyond the Wall becomes. People committed themselves to the construction of the Wall out of fear, but feared all imaginary enemies while it was being built.

Especially in the days right after the ceremony, I tried to avoid thinking about what happened on the ceremony day over and over again. I was afraid of remembering what had happened and who I was on that day because there was always an inexplicable fear that occupied me. Even if not everything that happened that day scares me, I could recall the story of how we shared our tickets with the crowd at the beginning of the ceremony, or how everyone complained about the protection work of the Great Wall and had all kinds of imaginary ideas. But what happened next scared me every time I look back on it.

I keep wondering why it turned out that way, when and who started it. Why was everyone talking about protecting the Wall, and the next second they could push it down with no qualms? Did it start the moment when the fence was pushed down? Or the first slogans people shouted? Or even the first piece of stone that fell? But none of these questions really mattered, because the Wall was about to disappear, and I had thought that it was not supposed to be preserved intact. However, I could not find these answers, or maybe the answers I got were so realistic that I became frightened.

I found that it was not just the destruction of the Wall that frightened me, but the state of revelry of the people at the time. The people appeared to be fearless, which is why they were celebrating without fear, but in fact, everyone's heart filled with fear, the fear of the imaginary enemy.

When the Great Wall was built, the people who built it feared the invasion of an unknown enemy as well as the imperial's orders. Those who later destroyed the Wall feared the feudal ideas that the Wall carried, and at the same time feared the demolition instructions from their superiors. All the different fears were thus transmitted in the demolition and reconstruction of the Great Wall. Even people's desire for massive projects comes from fear, the fear of being isolated, the fear of missing out on everything that happens in the world, and if everyone is doing it, am I wrong not to do it.

Our enemy, all along, is our fearfulness.

The whole ceremony was like placing our fears in front of us so that we would be so confused and in vain at the end of the ceremony. I wondered if we ended up building piles of stones to confront our own fears, or if it was just another way of dissolving our fears. Moreover, do those of us who have seen the inner fears count as understanding ourselves?

We always say that we want to know the story of the Great Wall, but we do not know how much of our story the Great Wall has quietly read over the thousands of years. We are as small as dust in front of the Great Wall that could disappear at any moment. The people who built it, those who destroyed it, and those who protected it will all disappear, and only the Great Wall will stay.

But I am not going to go any further into the question of the meanings that the Great Wall represented. There is a bird that has just landed by my window, and it stays for a moment and then spreads its wings and flies away. Perhaps one day it will fly over the silent Great Wall and find other stories of the Great Wall.

And I notice that the weather is very lovely at the moment and I have to go for a walk.

Best wishes,
I
2021, Helsinki

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